THE KAFKA PROTAGONIST AS KNIGHT ERRANT AND SCAPEGOAT

THESIS

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By

Mary R. Scrogin, B. A.
Denton, Texas
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This study presents an alternative approach to the novels of Franz Kafka through demonstrating that the Kafkan protagonist may be conceptualized in terms of mythic archetypes: the knight errant and the pharmakos. These complementary yet contending personalities animate the Kafkan victim-hero and account for his paradoxical nature. The widely varying fates of Karl Rossmann, Joseph K., and K. are foreshadowed and partially explained by their simultaneous kinship and uniqueness. The Kafka protagonist, like the hero of quest-romance, is engaged in a quest which symbolizes man's yearning to transcend sterile human existence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Speaking of the allegorical nature of much contemporary American fiction, Raymond Olderman states in Beyond the Waste Land that it "primarily reinforces the sense that contemporary fact is fabulous and may easily refer to meanings but never to any one simple Meaning."[1] A paraphrase of Olderman's comment may be appropriately applied to the writing of Franz Kafka: a Kafkan fable may easily refer to meanings but never to any one Meaning. The term "fable" is used deliberately but not dogmatically; the related but distinct term "myth" is an equally apt designation of the Kafkan literary mode.[2] Kafka (like so many writers since him) saw the fable or myth as the proper idiom for expressing the consciousness of modern man, the form which echoed its content. Central to every Kafkan fable is the character of the Kafkan protagonist, a being as equivocal and protean as the reality of his absurd world. A

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[1] Raymond M. Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen Sixties (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972), p. 5.

[2] Certainly, Kafka's "fables" have little in common with "fable" as it is known through Aesop or through its definition in Thrall and Hibbard: a Kafka fable does not aim at didacticism. Robert Scholes's term "fabulation" implies the distance between traditional fables and their mysterious, twentieth-century relatives.

multitude of approaches to the Kafka protagonist have been taken; however, most of these focus on the autobiographical nature of the character. Certainly, there is cogent support for viewing the Kafkan protagonist as an authorial projection in whole or in part. Many interesting and scholarly works have examined Kafka's fiction in the light of information gained from an analysis of Kafka's life and personality.[3] While such a biographical and psychological approach is fascinating, it is not the only means of coming to terms with the meanings of the Kafkan protagonist. This thesis demonstrates that the Kafkan "hero" may be conceptualized in terms of mythic archetypes. The Kafkan hero's enigmatic personality embraces two complementary archetypes: the pharmakos (scapegoat) and the knight errant. These complementary yet contending personalities animate the figure of the Kafkan protagonist and account for his paradoxical nature. Viewing Kafka's fictional personae as only thinly veiled self-portraits of their eccentric, highly individual author minimizes their universality and emphasizes the distance between Kafka and his readers. In contrast, an archetypal approach provides a means of relating Kafka's writing to a large body of Western literature and of making Kafka's vision more accessible to his readers. Kafka is, in fact, dealing with common, perhaps

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[3] H. S. Reiss, "Recent Kafka Criticism (1944-1955)--A Survey," in Kafka: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ronald Gray (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1962), p. 171.

inescapable, problems of human existence; that he uses archetypal symbols in dealing with these problems suggests that he is not so radically anomalous an artist as he is often thought to be. This is not to suggest that the pharmakos/knight errant scheme was a consciously formulated goal of Kafka's fiction making, but only that this scheme is one means of exploring, and more nearly comprehending, the troubling and troublesome figure one confronts in the Kafkan protagonist.

The external parallels between the conventions of quest-romance and the trappings and imagery found in Kafka's novels are easily pointed out. One function of this thesis is to point out such parallels; however, the similarity between quest-romance and the Kafka novels is not confined to the surface. The quest of the Grail knight, like that of the Kafka protagonist, is symbolic. That the Grail knight's quest is essentially metaphoric may be seen in the fact that the knight's failure to obtain the ostensible object of his quest, the Grail, does not render the quest abortive or absurd. In outlining the three stages of traditional romance, Frye defines the third, anagnorisis, as the "discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proven himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict."[4] Evidently, neither attainment of the Grail nor even physical survival is an index of the knight's success. The quest,

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[4] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 187.

rather than the means to an end, is the end itself, if a process may be referred to as an end. Journeys have long been used as a metaphor for life itself: the Grail quests express the yearning for a life which, through integrity and courage, would transcend the cruelty and sterility of human existence. The quester's mission is redemptive: through saving others he will save himself. Salvation is also the theme of the Kafkan quest, although a secular and existential salvation, rather than traditional Christian, is pursued. The avowed goal of the Kafka protagonist (whether it be a home in America, a favorable verdict, or a place in the Castle) is only the immediate or the apparent object of his quest. His true task is his life. He too must transcend quotidian reality through his quest, in this case another name for the existential process. The Kafkan protagonist, like the Grail knight, is offered a chance to save himself through a redemptive mode of being. He differs from the Grail knight in that his primary task is to salvage his own life. If he holds a promise for others it is only in his ability to serve as a model. In his modern myths Kafka employs archetypal symbols to discuss a universal problem, man's existential fate. In his three novels, Kafka presents three different views of the quest which is each man's life. Karl Rossmann, the perennial innocent, is spared the rigorous treatment to which his elder brothers, Joseph K., and K., are subjected; nevertheless, Karl's is essentially a quest toward self-discovery. He attains a

measure of anagnorisis albeit only through authorial fiat. Joseph K. exemplifies the fate of the man who fails in, or refuses to undertake, the existential quest. And K., Joseph K.'s mirror image, offers proof that the aim of the quest is to improve the quality and degree of life, and that the quester who fails in specifics may still succeed in general.

This study of the Kafkan hero as pharmakos and knight errant is confined to an analysis of Kafka's three novel-length works: Amerika, The Trial, and The Castle.[5] Brod's biography of Kafka and Kafka's diaries are mentioned only as they touch on the admittedly limited approach to the literature in question. Commentary on such short pieces as those found in The Penal Colony and The Great Wall of China has been excluded here in order to avoid more than the minimum amount of violence to the spirit of Kafka's art. Although similarities may be traced among many of Kafka's various works, only the broadest approach could encompass the entire corpus of his writing without adopting an unnaturally forced and myopic perspective. Perhaps all literary explication and criticism is by nature reductive; certainly all commentators on such a profound and puzzling message as Kafka's are destined from the outset to close more doors than they open. It is not the aim of this study to raze Kafka's Byzantine complexities in order to force his works into alignment with any schema. However, the

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[5] The research has been further limited by the author's lack of expertise in German; consequently, primary and secondary sources do not include any work not available in translation.

case for dealing jointly with the three novels is aesthetically defensible. Because of their mutual creation of similar, although significantly different, worlds, the three novels may be regarded as a kind of triptych; thus, while the novels call for individual attention, appraising them in their relation to each other hardly constitutes an unnatural ordering of the material. When one excludes the bewildering variety of short pieces in the Kafka cannon and concentrates solely on the three novels, striking parallels and meaningful, recurring patterns may be discerned.

Analysis of the Kafkan heroes is facilitated by a clear concept of Kafka's formal affinities. What is one dealing with when he grapples with Kafka's fictional legacy? The problem of classification is complicated by the fact that so many of Kafka's pieces, including the three novels, are ostensible fragments: ostensible because there is a highly credible school of thought that maintains the integrity and completeness of these so-called fragments. Is one dealing with fragments or non-fragments? And, once having answered that question, has one really answered anything? One becomes positively dizzy from the diverse and apparently contradictory genre labels applied to Kafka by his critics. Several critics appear to sidestep the issue of genre by likening Kafka's art to dreams, phenomena more often the province of psychoanalysts than of literary critics.[6] Critics of the "dream

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[6] Erich Fromm, The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths (New York: Rinehart, 1951), pp. 249-250.

school" are responsible for the fact that Kafka's novels are often examined as virtually uncensored expressions of his unconscious and that his literary content has been subjected to the analytical methods associated with Freudian dream therapy.[7] A second line of psychoanalytic interpretation has viewed the Kafka novels as deliberate rendering of Freudian theory in fictional frames.[8] But, while "dreamlike" is an adjective popular with Kafka's critics, there is by no means a consensus that it approximates a definitive categorization of the Kafkan mode. Eliseo Vivas in "Kafka's Distorted Mask" describes Kafka's creations as fables[9] while, in the same collection of essays, R. O. Winkler associates Kafka with "allegory."[10] Dissenting from Winkler is Erich Heller, who maintains that The Castle is a symbolic rather than an allegorical novel.[11] Thomas Mann represents Kafka as a "religious humorist,"[12] while Camus refers to Kafka's expression of tragedy and absurdity.[13] Certainly, only a pedant would

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[7] Calvin S. Hall and Richard E. Lind have even gone so far as to publish a study of Kafka's own recorded dreams and their importance to his art.

[8] Reiss, "Recent Kafka Criticism," in Kafka, p. 168.

[9] Eliseo Vivas, "Kafka's Distorted Mask," in Kafka, p. 133.

[10] R. O. Winkler, "The Novels," in Kafka, p. 45.

[11] Erich Heller, "The World of Franz Kafka," in Kafka, p. 106.

[12] Thomas Mann, "Homage," in The Castle, trans. by Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1926), p. x.

[13] Albert Camus, "Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka," in Kafka, p. 149.

insist that the appropriateness to Kafka of one of these various descriptions renders the remainder inappropriate. Yet what is one to do with a novel which is at once a fable, a myth, an allegory, not an allegory, a religious comedy, and an absurd tragedy?

Some sorting out of terms through reference to definitions and critical opinion may be a logical starting place in an attempt to place Amerika, The Trial, and The Castle in their proper genre. In order to gain a foothold, one begins by assuming that these three works, in addition to whatever else they may be, are novels: "novel" meaning, according to Thrall and Hibbard, "an extended fictional prose narrative."[14] Secondly, one does well to remember that the problem of categorization is exacerbated by failure to distinguish between functions of tone and functions of genre. For example, although The Trial and The Castle both offer instances of exquisitely absurd humor, neither one follows the formal conventions of comedy.

Northrop Frye, in Anatomy of Criticism, specifies five different modes which form a method of classification based on the "power of action" of a literary protagonist. The first of these modes, the mode in which one encounters the hero with the greatest power of action, is "myth." According to Frye, the mythic hero is superior "in kind both to other men

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[14] William Flint Thrall, Addison Hibbard and C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, rev. ed. (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 318.

and to the environment of other men" and is a divine being.[15] Frye's definition of "myth" seems to err on the side of conservatism and traditionalism, particularly to one who envisions Kafkan literature to be essentially mythic. However, Frye himself later refers to Kafka as an "ironic mythical writer"; obviously he is here using the term "mythical" in a sense not implied by his opening definition of modes. As one pursues Frye's argument one comes to the fifth, or "ironic" mode, characterized by the hero with the least power of action: he is "inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity."[16] That Frye would follow his classification of modes by applying the apparently oxymoronic label "mythic ironic" to Kafka seems in itself ironic. But it is an irony of which Frye is well aware. As he explains it: "irony descends from the low mimetic: it begins in realism and dispassionate observation. But as it does so it moves steadily towards myth. . . . Our five modes evidently go around in a circle."[17] This "circularity" Frye refers to may explain the disparate mixture of realism, fantasy, comedy, tragedy, myth and irony to be found in the Kafka novels.

If one wishes to think in terms of broad categories, a broad category most congenial to Kafka's novelistic writing

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[15] Frye, Anatomy, p. 33.

[16] Ibid., p. 34.

[17] Ibid., p. 42.

is that of "myth": myth in the sophisticated, secular sense drawn on by Frye and others, what Frye also calls "displaced myth." The related terms "fable," "romance," and "allegory" should also be mentioned here. Raymond Olderman states that "Many of the romance elements noticed by Henry James, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and posited by Richard Chase as the core of the American fictional tradition, continue to play a crucial part in the recent American novel."[18] He refers specifically to the contemporary novelist's use of symbolism, myth, and allegory in the construction of a modern romance, or, a word he uses interchangeably, "fable." Although Olderman's remarks are aimed at the literature of a time and place physically far removed from Kafka's, they are pertinent to Kafka's literature as well. Again, Frye's definition of "romance" as the second fictional mode based on the hero's power of action would hardly sanction our calling Amerika, The Trial, or The Castle romances or romantic novels; according to Frye's system, the hero of romance is "superior in degree to other men and to his environment."[19] Yet, in his "Theory of Genres," he goes on to say

> The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively.[20]

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[18] Olderman, p. 5.

[19] Frye, Anatomy, p. 33.

[20] Ibid., p. 304.

If romance has to do with the recognition and expression of the unconscious, and with the use of allegory, myth, and symbol (as Olderman suggests) then certainly one can see the romantic--Olderman might say "fabulous"--tendencies of Kafka's prose. And what of allegory? The problem here comes with taking Kafka's use of allegorical elements for proof that what he is writing is itself an allegory. Perhaps when one attempts to place Kafka generically one needs to use qualifiers. Kafka creates modern myth, romance, and fable and modified allegory: modified because it would be impossible and misguided to work out systematic correspondence between allegorical symbols and their counterparts in objective or subjective reality.

And what of "dreamlike" that nebulous, suggestive description so dear to Kafka critics? Frye sees a close tie between dream and both myth and the "quest-romance": "In the archetypal phase the work of literary art is a myth, and unites the ritual and the dream."[21] And later:

> The quest-romance has analogies to both rituals and dreams, and the rituals examined by Frazer and the dreams examined by Jung show the remarkable similarity in form that we should expect of two symbolic structures analogous to the same thing.[22]

Referring to Kafka's novels as myth, romance, fable, or dream, therefore, should pose no contradiction or confusion. The kinship, or circularity, of these terms reconciles their mutual claims to legitimacy in reference to the Kafkan mode.

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[21] Ibid., p. 118.

[22] Ibid., p. 193.

Frye's linking of ritual and dream (specifically as they are combined in myth and quest-romance) is happily to the point of this thesis: that the dissimilar archetypes of scapegoat and knight errant not only coexist within Karl Rossman, Joseph K., and K., but also complement one another and facilitate a clearer comprehension of the Kafka victim-hero.[23] The very word "scapegoat" conjures related images and ideas: tribal ritual, fertility cults, sympathetic magic, and sacrificial death. The Grail legends depict consanguine images and ideas; the staples of the quest-romance (the Fisher King, the Waste Land, the questing hero and his real or ritual death, the bleeding lance) strongly suggest mimesis of actual sacrifice. The arbitrarily chosen scapegoat who assumes the communal sins is analogous to the knight whose mission is also redemptive. The association of "scapegoat" and of "knight errant" with ritual is easily discerned, as is the association of "knight errant" with dream. When one considers the scapegoat, and, certainly, when one considers Kafka, one needs to remember that dream subsumes "nightmare."

"Scapegoat" is often equated with "innocent victim." This tendency is both partially correct and misleading. The pharmakos, or scapegoat, is innocent in the sense that the

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[23] Helen Weinberg, The New Novel in America: The Kafkan Mode in Contemporary Fiction, "Preface" (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), p. x.

inconsequence of his sins is out of all proportion to the enormity of his punishment. Further, as Frye points out, the status of scapegoat often acts to confer martyrdom.[24] The scapegoat is guilty in that he is human and, thus, sinful; in some instances (Joseph K. comes to mind) more specific and personal sins, in addition to his humanity, may be charged to the victim. Yet such sins are always grotesquely dwarfed by the resultant suffering.

The term "knight errant" suggests courtly love, chivalric romance, a noble adventurer, and damsels in distress; however, the term is used here in a specialized sense, the sense in which it applies to Kafkan romance. Certain elements of the Grail romances, specifically the Waste Land imagery and the concept of a seeker whose quest to right the subverted order is imperiled by dangerous obstacles, are consistent with the interpretation here presented of the Kafka knights errant. Other characteristics and conditions commonly attributed to a Grail knight or chivalric hero do not apply to Kafka's highly personalized, modern mythology, or they may apply in the case of one Kafka protagonist but not in that of another. The three victim-heroes to be examined here are related but separate individuals, partaking of the qualities of scapegoat and of knight errant in varying degrees. Finally, an arbitrary fate is not peculiar to the scapegoat alone, but may also be viewed as fastening onto the person of the knight errant.

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[24] Frye, Anatomy, p. 42.

This view is supported by Grail sources. As Jessie Weston affirms, Gawain "sets out on his journey with no clear idea of the task before him. He is taking the place of a knight mysteriously slain in his company, but whither he rides and why, he does not know, only that the business is important and pressing."[25] Does it not seem that casualty has more to do with Gawain's succession to the quest than does logical causality? The coincidence of Gawain's having been in the company of the slain knight appears to be the determining factor in Gawain's election as Grail knight. In the various Perceval stories, stress is laid upon the seeker's asking the appropriate questions about the Grail, yet why the task devolves on Perceval is never explained, why it is he whose posing the necessary question will restore vitality. In one significantly variant Perceval strain (The Perceval of Chretien de Troyes) the barrenness of the land results, not from the king's malady, but from the Quester's failure to formulate the proper question; thus the "desolation of the land . . . is directly attributable to the Quester himself."[26] Galahad is referred to by Weston as the "predestined winner"[27] and perhaps the concept of predestination applies to the other Grail Knights as well. It seems the "predestination" of the scapegoat is no less arbitrary than is the selection of the

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[25] Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1957), p. 12.

[26] Ibid., p. 15.

[27] Ibid., p. 20.

scapegoat. What places Karl Rossmann, Joseph K., and K. among those elected for knighthood and sacrifice? As Joseph K. puts it, "'We are all men here, one as much as the other.'"[28] The Kafka protagonist, in the manner of all men, is both innocent and guilty; yet he, from all men, is singled out to undertake a lonely mission. The measure to which he makes the mission his own is also the measure of his success.

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[28] Franz Kafka, The Trial, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1937), p. 210.

CHAPTER II

THE SPARED SACRIFICE

Speaking of the protagonists of his first two novels, Kafka made the following diary entry: "Rossman and K., the innocent and the guilty, both executed without distinction in the end. The guilty one with a gentler hand, more pushed aside than struck down."[1] Joseph K. is struck down rather than pushed aside and Karl, while his story is open-ended, seems (if one can trust Brod[2]), to have found a kind of deus-ex-machina salvation; yet there is no need to question the essential truth of Kafka's pronouncement. Karl is the only true innocent among the three Kafkan protagonists. His innocence lies, not in a scrupulous moral perfection, but in a childlike naivete about the ways of the world and the designs of his fellow man. Yet Karl's very innocence is a liability to himself and to others: his trustfulness makes him an available tool to all who would manipulate him to their own ends and sometimes, unwittingly, to their own ill (Robinson's

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[1] Franz Kafka, The Diaries of Franz Kafka (1914-1923), Vol. 2 ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg with the cooperation of Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1949), p. 132.

[2] Max Brod, "Afterword" in Franz Kafka, Amerika, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), p. 299.

beating at the hands of the lift boys for example). Karl's quest recalls both the affinities of the Grail romances with Christian mythology, and the Adamic metaphor common to much American Romanticism.

Karl is seen as the archetypal sinned-against innocent whose "guiltless sin" with the family maid costs him his home and family ties. Karl thus becomes an orphan hero of the style remarked by David Noble in The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden and typified by the heroes of Cooper. Karl casts off from Europe and its centuries of sin for America: Adam is to be given a second chance in the New World Eden. The labyrinthine passages of the ship's interior in which Karl spends his voyage constitute a richly allusive symbol. Suggestions of death and rebirth, of the hero's ingestion and subsequent disgorgement by Leviathan, and perhaps of Theseus all cluster about the image. But in what quest can one envision the ignorant, innocent Karl to be engaged? The most obvious answer is that he is to seek his way in the New World, a way far more uncertain and perilous than Karl can imagine. One may also see in Karl's relations with the Stoker, Uncle Jacob, and the Manageress the orphan's attempt to replace the parents he has been cut off from. Perhaps Karl is like Gawain in that he does not know the true nature or object of his quest. His foremost task would appear to be that of preserving his innocence in a world that militates against innocence and innocents. As Helen Weinberg wisely points out, one function

of "The Stoker" is to raise questions of innocence and guilt within the framework of an abortive trial, a trial which may be seen as continuing, although with Karl rather than the Stoker as the defendant, throughout Amerika.[3]

Questions of innocence and guilt pursue Karl through Amerika (and America) and form one of the major thematic strains of the novel. Perceiving Karl as a type of Adam figure, one may advert to the mistrustful questions Byron has his Cain ask of the providence which placed Cain's childlike father in the midst of temptations certain to be irresistibly attractive to his natural curiosity and defenseless simplicity. In this light, Karl may be seen, not only as a questing Adam in search of a New World Eden, but also as an Adamic scapegoat whose humanity is another name for original sin. Much as Adam, through his mythical fall, incurred responsibility for mankind's sinful tendencies, Karl assumes, or has thrust upon him, the sins of those he encounters in his quest. It is Karl who suffers for the maid's seduction of him, for his uncle's capricious rejection of him, and for Robinson's and Delamarche's designs on him. Yet Karl manages to retain his essential guiltlessness. The wrongs Karl commits are never conscious violations of rules known to him; in a sense, Karl has never taken the step fatal to the first Adam, tasting the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Karl's naivete and lack of comprehension

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[3] Weinberg, New Novel, p. 3.

and complicity are evident in Kafka's description of Karl's initiation into sexual experience:

> And once she called him "Karl" and, while he was still dumbfounded at this unusual familiarity, led him into her room, sighing and grimacing, and locked the door. Then she flung her arms round his neck, almost choking him, and while urging him to take off her clothes, she really took off his and laid him on her bed, as if she would never give him up to anyone and would tend and cherish him to the end of time. "Oh Karl, my Karl!" she cried; it was as if her eyes were devouring him, while his eyes saw nothing at all and he felt uncomfortable in all the warm bedclothes which she seemed to have piled up for him alone. Then she lay down by him and wanted some secret from him, but he could tell her none, and she showed anger, either in jest or in earnest, shook him, listened to his heart, offered her breast that he might listen to hers in turn, but could not bring him to do it, pressed her naked belly against his body, felt with her hand between his legs, so disgustingly that his head and neck started up from the pillows, then thrust her body several times against him--it was as if she were a part of himself, and for that reason, perhaps, he was seized with a terrible feeling of yearning. With the tears running down his cheeks he reached his own bed at last, after many entreaties from her to come again. That was all that had happened. . . .[4]

Regarding the fateful visit to Mr. Pollunder's, Karl, understandably, attaches far less importance to his uncle's objections than subsequent events reveal they warranted. As Uncle Jacob does not unequivocally withhold his permission for the proposed journey, Karl undertakes the visit in good faith, although with nagging misgivings about his uncle's inexplicable reservations:

> "My uncle wasn't annoyed at my going?"
> "Not at all! He didn't mean all that very seriously. He has your education so much at heart."

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[4] Franz Kafka, Amerika, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), pp. 29-30.

> "Did he tell you himself that he didn't mean it seriously?"
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> "Oh yes," said Mr. Pollunder, drawling the words, and thus proving that he could not tell a lie.
>
> "It's strange how unwilling he was to give me leave to visit you, although you are a friend of his."
>
> Mr. Pollunder too, although he did not admit it, could find no explanation for the problem, and both of them, as they drove through the warm evening in Mr. Pollunder's car, kept turning it over in their minds for a long time, although they spoke of other things.[5]

And, significantly, it is the one rule Karl "never needs"[6] that he forgets and, transgressing it, thereby loses both his position at the Hotel Occidental and the Manageress's faith in him. Pollunder's mentioning Karl's education is noteworthy: Karl's education is only fragmentary and remains so as a result of Uncle Jacob's dismissal of him. It is, in a deeper sense, precisely Karl's lack of education which constitutes a saving grace. Karl is, and remains, morally untouched by the evil he experiences. While he is initiated into sexual knowledge and into knowledge of mankind's perversity, Karl remains a passive object of the rite of initiation rather than an active celebrant. His knowledge is merely a function of the brain, not a condition of the soul. And it is an interesting observation that the heavier Karl's burden of assumed guilt becomes, the more clearly his innocence speaks to the reader.

If one is correct in depicting Karl as an essentially romantic Quest figure (as well as a scapegoat), one would

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[5] Ibid., p. 52.

[6] Ibid., p. 174.

anticipate Karl's encountering portentous, perhaps magical talismans and wonderful adversities in the course of his journey. Clearly, these exist in abundance. Karl's first vision of the New World is the suddenly illuminated Statue of Liberty appearing to Karl "so that he saw it in a new light, although he had sighted it long before. The arm with the sword rose up as if newly stretched aloft, and round the figure blew the free winds of heaven."[7] Rather than the well-known beacon, gracing the hand of Karl's Statue is a sword, an accoutrement far more in keeping with the conventions of the quest-romance. Rising out of the water, the Statue recalls a fleeting image from heraldic romance, Lancelot's Lady of the Lake. Kafka, being among the least effusive of writers, is not indulging in poetic hyperbole with his phrase "the free winds of heaven"; rather, he is accurately rendering Karl's hopes and perceptions. Further, the phrase draws on the Biblical image of the sword-brandishing angel guarding the gates of Paradise; perhaps Kafka playfully recasts the Old Testament watchdog-angel in the role of the gracious lady who welcomes Karl-Adam to his second-chance Eden. The Statue is but the first of many "signs and wonders which still happen in America if nowhere else."[8]

In accordance with the established traditions of knights errant, Karl must negotiate a labyrinth obstructing his path.

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[7] Ibid., p. 3.

[8] Ibid., p. 27.

Karl, however, is confronted with, not one labyrinth, but with many labyrinthine structures. The "endlessly recurring stairs" and "countless turnings"[9] he encounters below the liner's decks are but the first of many such mazes to confound his progress. The bedroom Karl occupies at Uncle Jacob's overlooks a scene of unhappy familiarity to any twentieth century American, but a scene which seems a constant marvel to the emigrant Karl:

> From morning to evening and far into the dreaming night that street was the channel for a constant stream of traffic which, seen from above, looked like an inextricable confusion, forever newly improvised, of foreshortened human figures and the roofs of all kinds of vehicles, sending into the upper air another confusion, more riotous and complicated, of noises, dust and smells, all of it enveloped and penetrated by a flood of light which the multitudinous objects in the street scattered, carried off and again busily brought back, with an effect as palpable to the dazzled eye as if a glass roof stretched over the street were being violently smashed into fragments at every moment.[10]

As if the evocative description of the street scene were not enough to etch the outlines of this second labyrinth, Uncle Jacob himself explicitly comments on the potentially dangerous effects of the enthralling chaos below Karl's balcony. The Senator likens Karl's arrival in America to a "rebirth" and cautions him against losing himself in contemplation of the endless flux and variety down in the street. Karl's American writing desk is another note in the recurring labyrinth motif

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[9] Ibid., p. 4.

[10] Ibid., p. 39.

and functions as a paradigm of manic technology (itself a labyrinthine edifice and one which is repeated in Uncle Jacob's business and in the Hotel Occidental). Again, Uncle Jacob adjures Karl not to make use of the regulator and thereby to produce the "complicated combinations of permutations"[11] the device is capable of. What possible threat can the maze-like apparatus of the desk pose to Karl? The desk causes Karl to recall memories of the Christmas pageant in his home and thoughts of his mother, memories which deflect him from his goal of shaping an autonomous identity in his new world. The labyrinthine imagery appears again and again throughout the novel, acting as an effective thematic and unifying device: almost an objective correlative of the ubiquitous frustrations lying in wait for the questing Karl. One further instance of a maze symbol which should be mentioned here is Mr. Pollunder's mansion. One of Amerika's most harrowingly surreal plot episodes finds Karl attempting to make his way back to Mr. Pollunder and, thus, to Uncle Jacob, whom the evening's unseemly events have made Karl long to return to. In a scene which seems a transcription of a horribly familiar nightmare, Karl, driven by a mounting sense of urgency, gropes through infinite, blind corridors which seem only to turn in upon themselves. At the precise moment when Karl seems most hopelessly lost, he encounters illusory salvation in the person

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[11] Ibid., p. 41.

of the old servant; Karl emerges from the maze but his "My room will never see me again"[12] is an ironic foreshadowing of his defeat: he is never to see his Uncle Jacob again. Mr. Pollunder's house is strongly reminiscent of one of the traditional trials of a Grail Knight as enumerated by Olderman: "a night vigil in the mad upside-down Chapel Perilous."[13] Karl loses not only his way but also his total sense of direction and perspective in this mansion which seems to be built from a blueprint by Escher:

> Of course he would take the candle with him, but even with a light it was not easy to find one's bearings. For instance, he did not even know whether this room was on the same floor as the dining-room. . . . To judge from the view, the room was fairly high up, and so he tried to convince himself that they must have climbed stairs; yet at the front door there had been steps to climb, so why should not this side of the house be raised above ground-level too? If only there were a ray of light to be seen from some door in the corridor or a voice to be heard in the distance, no matter how faintly! [14]

Sourceless winds accost the questing hero; rooms exist merely to make "a hollow sound"[15] and large breaches undermine the mansion's foundations. Yet despite the terror of the place and Karl's desire to be reunited with his uncle, the house holds a curious fascination for Karl: "he would have liked Mr. Pollunder to show him all round it by daylight and explain

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[12] Ibid., p. 78.

[13] Olderman, Waste Land, p. 12.

[14] Kafka, Amerika, p. 73.

[15] Ibid., p. 74.

everything to him."[16] Most strikingly, one is told Karl has been wandering in the part of the house "near the chapel."[17] As one might expect of a Kafkan romance, Karl's night vigil in the Chapel Perilous has a most ambiguous outcome. He does emerge from the Chapel/labyrinth, yet he is not to obtain the goal he hoped to reach at the labyrinth's end: Uncle Jacob and the security he seems to offer.

Another recurrent thematic and symbolic strain centers around Karl's box. If Amerika were, in fact, an allegory, Karl's trunk would represent and exactly correspond to some identifiable object or abstraction from the world outside the novel. No such neat alignment of correspondences is to be found for this allegorical element in Kafka, however. Yet, despite their impeccable realistic-naturalistic style, Kafka novels demand a non-literal reading--better, they demand both a literal and non-literal reading. Kafka's absolute refusal to employ definitively analyzable symbols enables him to achieve the dream-like ambience of his tales, the feeling that the whole is always greater than the sum of its identifiable parts. But understanding that Kafka's Meaning cannot be impaled on a categorical pin does not entail forsaking the attempt to discover his possible meanings. Any interpretation which cannot comfortably accommodate the symbolic furniture of Kafka's fictive construct is a misconstruction. Karl's

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[16] Ibid., p. 75.

[17] Ibid., p. 77.

trunk is an indispensable piece of this furniture and must be accounted for as it affects the hero's role as knight errant and scapegoat.

One way of getting at the possible meaning and function of the box is to examine the feelings it engenders in the reader. The feelings are ambivalent: one regards the box as a source of protection and support and as a sometimes oppressive burden. The box is perhaps something necessary which must be safeguarded, perhaps something cumbersome which could be dispensed with. Despite Kafka's lack of interest in pat symbolic relationships, the box image nevertheless suggests a cluster of associations which are valid and mutually viable referents of the box. The box seems to be bound up with Karl's ties to his past, his parents, his native country, his sense of well being. The box may also be seen as an extension of Karl's self; thus, Karl's fundamental qualities may be projected on to the box. In this way the box can represent both Karl's inexperienced innocence and original sin. If it seems overtaxing the symbol to suggest it conveys both innocence and original sin, one might point out that such a contradictory burden is allotted to every newborn: a being who is, at once, both archetypal Innocent and inheritor of the Adamic curse.

In conjunction with Karl's role as knight errant, one may think of the box as part of the knight's equipage; it is

an article which has been bestowed on him and which, in some way, will figure in his Quest. Karl tells Mr. Green that the box had belonged to Karl's father and is "the kind of box soldiers in my country take with them when they join the army."[18] The article's having been passed from father to son and having been in previous battles establish it as an appropriate accoutrement. Karl seems in danger of parting from his box before ever setting foot on his new land. During Karl's first few words with the Stoker he recalls he has left, and probably lost, his trunk on the upper deck. In response to the Stoker's "Can't you do without your box?"[19] Karl gives an unqualified negative. Moments later Karl is thinking "Perhaps I should join up with this man . . . where am I likely to find a better friend?"[20] After the Stoker rebukes him, Karl immediately reverts to thoughts of his box and of his father: ". . . he would have done better to go and get his box instead of handing out advice that was merely regarded as stupid. When his father had given him the box for good he had said in jest: 'How long will you keep it?' and now that faithful box had perhaps been lost in earnest."[21] The trunk is specifically linked with Karl's father; further, the box's being mentioned in connection with Karl's meeting the Stoker

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[18] Ibid., p. 96.

[19] Ibid., p. 5.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 8.

serves to identify the Stoker as one of Karl's surrogate fathers. At one level, Karl sees the object of his quest as being the replacement of his lost parents; consequently, Karl's attraction to the Stoker acts to minimize his concern over the trunk. While under the aegis of another father figure, Uncle Jacob, Karl evidently has no need of the trunk. It is not mentioned until the evening at Mr. Pollunder's house when Karl is informed of his uncle's having cut him off:

> "A man called Schubal, an engineer in the Hamburg-America Line, brought the things; he maintained that he found them on the ship. . . ."
> "Now I have my old things back again at least," said Karl, laying the umbrella on the box.[22]

It is ironic, at least, that Schubal is behind the trunk's being restored to Karl, a fact which causes Karl some apprehension over the condition of the trunk's contents. As if in confirmation of his fears, Karl's belongings seem to have altered for the worse during their stay with Schubal and Karl's stay with Uncle Jacob.

The knight's trusted accoutrement becomes a burden when Karl takes to the road with Robinson and Delamarche. Whether one thinks of the box as suggesting Karl's authentic selfhood, responsibility, original sin, parental protection, or innocence, or as a composite of these things, apparently Karl feels little need of, or concern with, these things while he is shielded by a parent figure. When Karl is thrown back on his own resources, however, he feels the full material and psychic

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[22] Ibid., p. 95.

weight of his box/burden. The box becomes a source of worry; Karl must defend it from defilement or usurpation by his two rascally comrades. When Karl inspects the contents of his returned trunk he finds that his passport has also been returned to him:[23] validation of his parent based self-concept has been reestablished. The Veronese salami is a curious detail apt to tempt more than one explicator into Freudian theorizing. Its shape suggests phallic imagery while its origin and pervasive (and, one assumes, repugnant) odor would seem to suggest incestuous desire and its attendant feelings of revulsion.[24] (The view of the trunk as, among other things, an extension of Karl's personality would make such an interpretation of the salami reasonable.) The salami is also a source of sustenance which has been provided Karl. It may be thought of as combining two of the standard symbols of quest-romance; the phallic lance and the food-giving bowl, with its deliberate symbolism of the female genitals, are perhaps transmogrified, with the ambiguous concentration peculiar to Kafka and to dreams, into the Veronese salami. In one of the two instances where Robinson actually does assist Karl with the trunk, he is motivated only by his greedy appetite. Too proud to protest as Delamarche and Robinson virtually ravish the salami,

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[23] Ibid., p. 101.

[24] Mark Spilka, "Amerika: Its Genesis," in Franz Kafka Today, ed. Angel Flores and Homer Swander (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 113.

Karl nevertheless feels "bitter"[25] at their violation of his rights, and perhaps of his inmost self.

Despite promising "to take turns at carrying his box,"[26] Robinson and Delamarche almost invariably come in contact with the box only to plunder it, much as they take up with Karl only to use him. It is finally their desecration of the trunk which decides Karl to break with his ill-chosen sidekicks:

> I think none the less of you because you own nothing, but you grudge me my few possessions and try to humiliate me because of them, and that I cannot endure. And you break open my box and offer no word of excuse, but abuse me instead and my people as well--and that simply makes it impossible for me to stay with you.[27]

Here the trunk is clearly connected with Karl's concept of himself, his integrity, and his heritage; earlier Karl has berated Robinson and Delamarche for having left the box "at anybody's mercy,"[28] certainly not a phrase often applied to inanimate objects, but one consistent with a view of the box as emblematic of innocence and of the knight-hero's potential for full selfhood.

The trunk's capacity to encumber or retard Karl as well as the dubious quality of its protective powers, may be seen

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[25] Kafka, Amerika, p. 110.

[26] Ibid., p. 105.

[27] Ibid., p. 127.

[28] Ibid., p. 125.

when Karl must "step back over the box"[29] in order to retreat before the advancing Delamarche, who, merely kicking the box out of his way, closes in on Karl. At this moment, Karl, and his trunk, are rescued by the Manageress's emissary, but not without having sustained a loss. The photograph, Karl's only remaining relic of his parents, and one for which he would exchange the "box and everything in it,"[30] is missing. The importance attached to the photograph does not overshadow the trunk's several meanings in favor of an exclusively parental significance if one recognizes that the picture of Karl's parents would also be an intelligible symbol for all of the various meanings here attributed to the trunk. When Karl leaves Delamarche and Robinson, the waiter shoulders the burdensome trunk for him, a fitting prelude to the Manageress's assumption of a parental role and, consequently, of many of the responsibilities that have burdened Karl in his freedom on the road.

Karl attaches little or no importance to the trunk during his enjoyment of the Manageress's patronage. The trunk again becomes worthy of mention only when Karl has been dismissed from his post at the Hotel Occidental and discredited in the eyes of his protectress. After his confrontation with the Head Waiter, Karl tests Therese's faith in his innocence by

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[29] Ibid., p. 128.

[30] Ibid., p. 130.

asking her if she will attend to packing and forwarding his trunk, deliberately attaching an air of special importance to his request:

> In spite of himself he had to shake his head in astonishment, so quickly did Therese catch the implications of the question, and in her conviction that there were things in the box which no one must see, she did not take time even to glance at Karl, even to shake his hand, but merely whispered: "Certainly, Karl, at once, I'll pack the box this minute." And she was gone.[31]

In Therese's eyes the box has become the concrete testimony of Karl's guilt: the knight's accoutrement is, in fact, a crippling burden. And while Therese seeks to hide rather than to expose the guilt the box has affixed to Karl, her doing so makes her defection no less a blow to him. The trunk in which Karl had reposed his trust and his hopes of protection has become the agent through which his alleged guilt is attested to and through which he is deprived of the remaining proponent of his innocence. The trunk, as such, passes out of the story at this point; presumably it is forwarded to the Pension Brenner where Karl never arrives. However, Karl is not yet through with boxes, as his imprisonment by Delamarche, Robinson, and Brunelda reveals.

Robinson's inept trickery at the hotel is nevertheless successful in delivering Karl up to Delamarche, whom, thanks to the policeman's meddling, Karl now looks upon as "his only possible salvation."[32] Here, as with the trunk, Karl puts

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[31] Ibid., p. 193.

[32] Ibid., p. 217.

his trust in the most questionable of receptacles. Although Delamarche quite possibly saves Karl from the policeman and his jail, this highly equivocal salvation merely exchanges the threat of jail for the actuality of it. The trunk motif reappears with Robinson's remarks to Karl on the crowded contents of Brunelda's apartment: "But you've no idea whatever how many things are in that room; all the trunks are full and behind the trunks the whole place is crammed to the very roof."[33]

Not only is the apartment full of trunks, it is itself a trunk in which Karl, the victim-hero, finds himself effectually trapped. His utter lack of wiles and his tendency to rely on inappropriate sources for security have encased him within his own box and served to transform the would-be-knight into the scapegoat. While out on the balcony (itself a boxlike structure) Karl becomes aware of his situation as the confines of the box appear to take on human shape and to close in on him:

> "Leave him alone," said Brunelda, pushing away Delamarche's hand, "he'll stay all right." And she squeezed Karl still more firmly against the railing, so that he would have had to struggle with her to get away from her. And even if he were to free himself, what could he gain by that! Delamarche was standing on his left, Robinson had now moved across to his right; he was literally a prisoner.[34]

Later, in Karl's desperate attempt to escape the fastness, another box proves to be Delamarche's means of adding injury to the insults already heaped on Karl:

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[33] Ibid., p. 240.

[34] Ibid., p. 254.

> He seized Karl by the shirt-front, lifted him nearly off the floor and without even looking at him in his contempt flung him so violently against a chest standing a few steps away that at first Karl thought the searing pains in his back and head caused by the collision were the direct result of Delamarche's handling. "You scoundrel!" he could hear Delamarche shouting in the darkness that rose before his wavering eyes. And as he sank down fainting beside the chest the words "You just wait!" still rang dimly in his ears.[35]

Kafka is the Houdini who rescues Karl from the box/prison. The fragmentary chapter dealing with Karl's servitude to Brunelda ends with Karl falling alseep; miraculously, the next chapter opens with Karl standing before the poster for the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma. Are we to assume that the visionary apocalypse is merely a dream? From Brod's testimony it would seem Kafka intended a kind of supernatural reconciliation of the novel's conflict, a reconciliation that would be but spurious if Amerika's closing scenes were only the dream of a prisoner. Or, perhaps, the dream of a prisoner is a close analogue to the promise of the modern church, one frequent connotation of the Nature Theatre. The evidence is inconclusive: at best, equivocal. And perhaps it is ultimately unimportant whether Karl is awake or dreams. His quest only becomes successful with his acceptance into the Theatre; yet it is crucial that his quest can be successful only in a realm which is indisputably far removed from the America of Karl's previous empirical evidence. Whether by a dream, a miracle, or an act of absurd creation, Karl finds himself

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[35] Ibid., p. 260.

freed from both the box-as-prison and the box-as-burden in the Theatre of Oklahoma where no one carries any luggage. "The only thing that could be called luggage was the perambulator, which the father was pushing at the head of the troop. . . ."[36] The perambulator signals Karl's final victory over his former dependency on his lost parents and suggests his eventual emergence into maturity. Karl's identification papers have been lost with his trunk; but the loss works to his advantage in his shaping a new identity for himself, the identity of a knight errant rather than a scapegoat.

The box proves to be more of an encumbrance than a source of support to Karl in his quest. Yet to both Karl the Knight Errant and Karl the Scapegoat, the box is something which cannot be finally dispensed with until the apocalypse. As scapegoat, Karl is laden with his own original sin and with the assumed sins of others; he can unburden himself only in the all-forgiving world of the Nature Theatre. Ironically, Karl's very innocence, which has only served to waylay and entrap him in the America outside the Theatre, is such that it precluded Karl's ridding himself of it. Only in the "Theatre of Eden" can Karl's innocence be rendered harmless to himself and to others. As knight errant, Karl is faced with the task of attaining full selfhood: of defining himself in terms of his solitary, existential self, rather than in terms of his

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[36] Ibid., p. 296.

heritage. Perhaps the hopefulness of the closing chapter seems only wistful when one considers that Karl is trapped by his trunk (fails in his quest) in every arena but the visionary Theatre. Karl fails to attain adult status through the conventional means: education, experience, career, or a romantic relationship culminating in marriage. Is it only through authorial sleight-of-hand that Karl may be both dispossessed of the burden of his humanity and advanced to the object of his quest, a born-again identity?

This comparison of Karl to Adam shows the close relationship between the two archetypes, knight errant and scapegoat. As scapegoat, Karl/Adam is made to answer both for his own sin (which caused him to be ejected from the haven of his family and home) and for the sins of those he associates with--perhaps for all sins. As knight errant, Karl/Adam is seeking to wrest a place for himself in the world outside the Eden of his forbidden family circle. In a sense, it is on Karl's head (as on Adam's) that responsibility for the subverted order of the New World falls, as his forbidden action expelled him from the parental shelter and into the chaos of America.

Seen in this light, the Waste Land motif common to the quest-romance has implications, not only for Karl's role as quester, but also for his role as pharmakos. What evidence exists to warrant the application of "Waste Land" to the America of Karl's experience? Certainly there is no evidence

of drought or famine in the land; curiously, almost no mention is made of what is commonly meant by "nature" except for the word's appearing in the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma. Human nature and unnatural technology (including mercantilism) constitute the evidence that Karl is wandering in a Waste Land. The machines in Amerika seem to have acquired a malevolent will of their own, turning their so-called owners into slaves. It is no accident that Karl becomes a lift-boy--perhaps a "lift's boy" would be closer to the truth. He has long hoped to be an engineer, but in America the engines themselves seem to be at the controls. The traffic scenes are almost uniformly sinister in their suggestion of the automobiles' autonomy:

> Now and then an automobile shot out of the mist and all three turned their heads to gaze after the larger monsters, which were so remarkable to look at and passed so quickly that they never even noticed whether anyone was sitting inside. Later they began to meet columns of vehicles bringing provisions to New York, which streamed past in five rows taking up the whole breadth of the road and so continuously that no one could have got across to the other side. . . . Of course the speed at which they went was not always the same. At some of the squares, because of a great rush of traffic from the side roads, large-scale adjustments had to be made and then whole rows of vehicles came to a stand-still, jerking forward by inches, but after that for a little while everything would fly past at lightning speed again until, as if goverened by a single brake, the traffic slowed down once more.[37]

In contrast to the frenzied, but apparently self-regulating activity of the traffic, human society in America operates at

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[37] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

a blind full-tilt. The laws of motion seem to be suspended, or subsumed by the second law of thermodynamics. Entropy manifests itself in the senseless bustle which results only and everywhere in frustration. The Hotel Occidental (whose name suggests its representativeness of all Western, specifically all "Amerikan," culture) is a perfect model for the closed system's tendency to subvert and dissipate all energy:

> It seemed that they must be near a big town, for the very first room of the hotel that Karl entered was filled with a noisy crowd, and at the buffet, which ran along the whole length and two sides of the room, a host of waiters with white aprons kept rushing about yet could not satisfy their impatient customers, for loud cursing and the pounding of fists on tables sounded unceasingly from all quarters. No one paid any attention to Karl; in the body of the saloon itself there was no service . . . the customers, . . . however, accepted every inconvenience apathetically, even when Karl cannoned violently into a table--through no fault of his own, certainly--and almost knocked it over. He apologized, but obviously without being understood; nor could he for his part make out any of the remarks that were shouted at him.[38]

In the sterile vacuum of the Waste Land communication is impossible. But, to the reader, echoes of the labyrinth resound in such a passage and raise the question of whether the labyrinth itself is a closed system. In view of the miraculous nature of Karl's arrival in the Nature Theatre, one can assume that the labyrinth's exit is either an illusion, or a revelation which supersedes the operation of the natural laws observed in America.

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[38] Ibid., pp. 117-118.

Even giants and would-be leaders must succumb to the undertow of circular, hence directionless, motion. Karl's first glimpse of American democracy in action is the street scene where actors in a domestic drama resemble drowning men:

> His [the candidate's] gigantic bearer had now no initiative at all in movement, for the crowd was too dense. . . . Even he, strong giant as he was, could not take a step of his own free will, and it was out of the question to think of influencing the crowd by turning to face this section or that, by making dramatic advances or retreats. The mob was flowing backwards and forwards without plan, each man propelled by his neighbour, not one braced on his own feet; the opposition party seemed to have gained a lot of new recruits; the bearer, after stemming the tide for a while outside the restaurant door, was now letting himself be swept up and down the street, apparently without resistance; the candidate still kept on uttering words, but it was no longer clear whether he was outlining his programme or shouting for help.[39]

What hope can Karl have of making a purposeful path for himself when such a path must bisect the vortex of human activity? How, but through the vortex, can Karl be accepted into the human community and thus lose the stigma attached to his alien status?

Perhaps, like Perceval, Karl can vanquish the Waste Land only through formulating the proper question. In Karl's case, the magical question seems to be "Who am I?" The scapegoat need not be slaughtered in order to bring harmony to the land; a ritual death is sufficient. Through Karl's redefining himself, dying to his old, parent-oriented existence, he is able to exchange the paradox posed by the vortex for the

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[39] Ibid., pp. 255-56.

reconciliation offered by the Oklahoma Theatre. If Karl's sin (his failure to ask the question) is the cause, rather than merely an effect, of the Waste Land, surely it is only as Karl's sin takes on the coloration of collective mankind's failure to frame the needed question. At the same time, Karl's finally asking the question may be seen as a means, or at least a model, for delivering all men from the curse of the Waste Land.

Damsels in distress are, like the labyrinth, the talisman, and the Waste Land, a fixture of quest-romance which has significance for Karl in both his archetypal roles. The female characters of Amerika constitute a trial for the hero, much as their counterparts in Grail romances often do. Karl's seduction by Johanna Brummer, and his parents' reaction to it, launches Karl on his quest. Clara Pollunder's implicitly sexual aggression against Karl is another potential snare for him. While Karl does not respond to Clara sexually, she is nevertheless the final and insurmountable obstacle to Karl's returning to Uncle Jacob. While Karl is taking leave of Clara the clock strikes twelve and (though Karl does not yet know it) his fairy tale deliverance by his uncle becomes part of a sealed past. Both the Manageress and Therese, who is another sexually equivocal female, seem to offer Karl support in his quest; yet they betray their favorite when his innocence appears compromised. Brunelda is the most clearly dangerous of the women Karl encounters and, for that reason perhaps, the one he escapes with having sustained only physical injury;

Brunelda's humiliation of Karl does not wound him physically as do the machinations and betrayals of the others.

If women challenge Karl's progress as knight errant, they make equally excessive demands of him as a scapegoat. Karl is punished for Johanna's and Clara's transgressions: Johanna's costs him his parents; and Clara's his uncle. Both the Manageress and Therese place a burden of guilt on Karl when they fail to maintain belief in his basic innocence against the charges of the Head Waiter. Brunelda, by no means the first master to make a scapegoat of a slave, charges Karl's enforced presence in her room with sinful intent:

> "And look at that boy, that stranger, who has just been staring savagely at me, how he is pretending to lie down again to fool me. Turn them out, Delamarche, they're a burden on me, they're a weight on my breast; if I die now it will be their fault."[40]

In an examination of Karl's functioning as scapegoat for the women he encounters, Kafka's linking of original sin with the Oedipal complex can hardly be ignored. In a 1913 diary entry, Kafka makes an implicit, but nonetheless clear, connection between the "filth and slime" of a "real birth" and the Oedipal content of his story The Judgement.[41] Hildegard Platzer explicitly equates the male-female relationships in Kafka with "original sin--call it disobedience or hubris."[42]

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[40] Ibid., pp. 228-229.

[41] Franz Kafka, The Diaries of Franz Kafka (1910-1913) Vol I, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 278.

[42] Hildegard Platzer, "Sex, Marriage, and Guilt: The Dilemma of Mating in Kafka," Mosaic, 3, No. 4 (Summer, 1970), 122.

According to Platzer, Kafkan sexual relationships are taboo because of their incestuous intent. Certainly, incestuous overtones exist in Karl's relations with the females of Amerika. Both in her age and in her smothering, repugnant sexuality Johanna Brummer is suggestive of a mother figure. Clara Pollunder, while less clearly a mother figure, is still a taboo female by virtue of her being the daughter of Karl's host; further, in light of Mack's role as Karl's riding master, Mack's fiancee takes on the emotional valence of a mother substitute. In her age and her close ties to Prague, the Manageress is reminiscent of Karl's natural mother, and in her protective supervision of Karl she becomes a kind of adoptive mother. Therese, as Mark Spilka points out, acts as a kind of sister figure both in her concern that Karl might supplant her in the Manageress's affection and in her combination of comradeship and elusive sexuality.[43] Brunelda appears as a kind of "terrible mother," a figure which Jung associates with "the fear of incest" and which Frye identifies as a common female antagonist of romance.[44] Karl's misfortunes at the hands of such mother figures establish a pattern which confirms his burden of original sin.

This pattern is broken by Karl's positive encounter with Fanny in the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma. Although Fanny has

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[43] Spilka, "Amerika," Kafka Today, p. 109.

[44] Frye, Anatomy, p. 196.

not appeared in the story before Karl's meeting her in her angelic guise, clearly they have a previously established rapport: "'Karl!' cried an angel. Karl looked up and in delighted surprise began to laugh. It was Fanny."[45] Karl has been recognized by Fanny because he has courageously negotiated the platform of angels in pursuit of his quest:

> "Couldn't you go into the race-course and ask where the workers are being taken on?"
> "Yes," said Karl, "but I would have to cross the platform, among all the angels."
> "Is that so very difficult?" asked the woman.
> She seemed to think it an easy path for Karl, but she was unwilling to let her husband go.
> "All right," said Karl, "I'll go."
> "That's very good of you." said the woman, and both she and her husband took Karl's hand and pressed it.[46]

Evidently, Karl has acquitted himself well in undertaking the trial of the platform. Perhaps Fanny has been a female who, either by reason of a sisterly relationship or by the dictates of friendship, has formerly appeared to Karl as sexually taboo; whether or not this is the case, the Karl of the Oklahoma Theatre is far from fearful of her. Their meeting is both a reunion and a symbolic sexual union:

> "Come up here!" cried Fanny. "You're surely not going to pass me like that!" And she parted her draperies so that the pedestal and a little ladder leading up to it became visible.
> "Is one allowed to go up?" asked Karl.
> "Who can forbid us to shake hands! cried Fanny, and she looked round indignantly, in case anyone might be

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[45] Kafka, Amerika, p. 277.

[46] Ibid., p. 276.

> coming to intervene. But Karl was already running up the ladder.
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> "Not so fast!" cried Fanny. "The Pedestal and both of us will come to grief!" But nothing happened, Karl reached the top in safety.[47]

Only after Karl safely descends Fanny's ladder does the heretofore invisible management of the Theatre appear to Karl in the person of the staff manager. Karl has both escaped the burden of original sin and completed an important stage of his quest through his relations with Fanny.

Karl has answered the call of the Theatre of Oklahoma, hoping "to find some way of at least beginning a decent life."[48] An obstacle seems imminent when the staff manager,referring to the formalities of recruiting, seems to regard the applicants' possession of identification papers as a foregone conclusion. Karl no longer has such papers; however, he seems curiously unruffled by their loss, as if, in losing his trunk, Karl has ceased to put faith in such incidentals. The threatened obstacle is immaterial to the newly self-confident Karl. Thinking that "his lack of papers made it imperative for him to rush through the formalities with all possible speed,"[49] Karl presents himself to the bureau for engineers. However, on finding that Karl is not yet an engineer, the administrators

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[47] Ibid., p. 277.

[48] Ibid., p. 273.

[49] Ibid., p. 283.

send him to another bureau; evidently the powers that be are only interested in an existential definition of oneself. The not-yet-engineer finally ends up at the bureau for European intermediate pupils. At last Karl has found a place where the voice of arbitrary authority is all but ignored. The clerk pays no attention to the bureau head's censure of Karl's lack of papers or to his incredulity over Karl's offering "Negro" as his name, but engages Karl at once. Spilka sees Karl's failure to give his real name as a momentary lapse of faith, a return to childish insecurity, which an indulgent authority is prepared to forgive Karl.[50] Spilka's interpretation is valuable, but others suggest themselves. Karl's reason for not giving his own name reveals his fear of defining himself as a process; Karl still feels that he must define himself in terms of achievement, or career:

> But there was another little delay, while they asked him what his name was. He did not reply at once; he felt shy of mentioning his own name and letting it be written down. As soon as he had a place here, no matter how small, and filled it satisfactorily, they could have his name, but not now; he had concealed it too long to give it away now. So as no other name occurred to him at the moment, he gave the nickname he had had in his last post: "Negro."[51]

"Negro" confers, not only the dubious advantage of disguise, but also the potential mutability and freedom of an anomalous status. Perhaps Karl has inadvertently done well in his "lapse," given the religious context of the Oklahoma Theatre.

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[50] Spilka, "Amerika," in Kafka Today, p. 114.

[51] Kafka, Amerika, p. 286.

Rather than adding real guilt to his burden of original sin through arguing his innocence or superiority, Karl has entered the Theatre through becoming the most lowly; perhaps it is thus that the needle's-eye aperture of the labyrinth opens up before Karl?

Later, Karl himself sees the pointlessness of clinging to his pre-fabricated but unrealized definition of himself:

> "What did you want to study originally?"
> To define the question more exactly--the gentleman seemed to lay great weight on exact definition,--he added: "In Europe, I mean," at the same time removing his hand from his chin and waving it slightly as if to indicate both how remote Europe was and how unimportant were any plans that might have been made there.
> Karl said: "I wanted to be an engineer." This answer almost stuck in his throat; it was absurd of him, knowing as he did the kind of career he had had in America, to bring up the old day-dream of having wanted to be an engineer--would he ever have become an engineer even in Europe?--but he simply did not know what other answer to make and so gave this one.
> Yet the gentleman took it seriously, as he took everything seriously. "Well, you can't turn into an engineer all at once," he said, "but perhaps it would suit you for the time being to be attached to some minor technical work."
> "Certainly," said Karl. He was perfectly satisfied. . . .[52]

Karl is satisfied with a contingent definition, an identity-in-process. He decides that he "would not have minded seeing his real name on the board"[53] after all; he has given his allegiance to an existential mode of answering the question, "Who am I?" and it is significant that the only ending to

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[52] Ibid., p. 290.

[53] Ibid., p. 291.

Amerika finds Karl still involved with a journey.

How does one make the leap of faith that explains Karl's removal from Brunelda's rooms to the Oklahoma Theatre? Secondly, how does one reconcile Kafka's acknowledged intent for the Theatre with the blend of chaos and mechanical organization which seem to have carried over into the Theatre from the America surrounding it? During Karl's attempted defense of the Stoker, Uncle Jacob makes a distinction which is to have significance for Karl during the course of his quest:

> "Don't mistake the situation," said the Senator to Karl, "this may be a question of justice, but at the same time it's a question of discipline. On this ship both of these, and most especially the latter, are entirely within the discretion of the Captain."[54]

When Karl is being arraigned by the Head Waiter he has occasion to witness the operation of discipline divorced from the qualities of divine justice. The innocent scapegoat sees the futility of defending "oneself where there is no good will"[55] and chooses to remain silent rather than to defend himself in the midst of such enmity. The Oklahoma Theatre, despite its superficial resemblance to the texture of American life, is qualitatively different from that life in that it offers Karl an instance of compassionate justice (perhaps even indulgence) in the bureau clerk who engages Karl without reference to past or present offences. Good will and justice are also the means

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[54] Ibid., p. 33.

[55] Ibid., p. 188.

of redeeming the bustle and bureaucracy of the Nature Theatre from the soul-killing stultification of Amerikan entropy. Thus it is that one of the "gentlemen" finally asks Karl the question he had long awaited as a lift-boy, whether or not his work at the Hotel satisfied him.

Karl, the missing person, finds himself in the Oklahoma Theatre by asking the question, "Who am I?" and by accepting its answer as yet another quest. While still questing, Karl is now embarked on an elected journey of self-discovery, rather than on an arbitrarily imposed journey which is more like flight from, than movement toward. He retains his role as knight errant while freeing himself of the role of scape-goat. The "innocent" sins for which authoritarian parents (in one form or another) have sacrificed Karl have been allowed in the Theatre as part of a process toward self and maturity.

CHAPTER III

THE FAILED QUEST

As we turn from Karl Rossman to Joseph K., we move out of the age of innocence into the age of accountability. Kafka was thirty one years old at the time he began The Trial,[1] a point of fact which does not minimize the symbolic portentousness of Joseph K.'s age. The novel begins on the morning of the hero's thirtieth birthday, a morning on which he awakens to the conviction that he has been "traduced" and "arrested."[2] The narrative of The Trial, although couched in the third person, clearly expresses the consciousness of the protagonist.[3] In this light, "without having done anything wrong" becomes Joseph K.'s subjective view of his situation, rather than the judicious pronouncement of an omniscient observer. Kafka himself adjudged his hero guilty; it has fallen to countless readers and commentators to determine of what. Between the arrest of Joseph K. and his death one year later are interposed his futile attempts to conquer the legal maze in which he becomes entrapped. The maze, adumbrated by a profusion of

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[1] Max Brod, Franz Kafka: A Biography, trans. by G. Humphreys Roberts (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), p. 146.

[2] Franz Kafka, The Trial, p. 1.

[3] George H. Szanto, Narrative Consciousness: Structure and Perception in the Fiction of Kafka, Beckett, and Robbe-Grillet (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), p. 6.

labyrinthine images, suggests Joseph K.'s involvement in a quest and his functioning as a knight errant; the quest's ending in death establishes Joseph K. as a pharmakos sacrificed to the labyrinth. Yet the very existence of the maze seems to imply the possibility of escape and redemption for the knight capable of taking the right turns. Certainly K. envisions another outcome than death as a result of his trial in the labyrinth. Never consciously questioning his own innocence, Joseph K. enters the maze in order to justify himself in the eyes of the Court; yet his every action toward self-exoneration only moves him closer toward the degrading death which awaits him.

In view of his pathetic-ironic (some would say absurd) death, Joseph K. may seem an unlikely figure for a quest-romance. However, as John B. Vickery points out, "Though doubtless the pure romance has little affinity with irony, it is also true that the romances closest to us in time, whether of Hawthorne or Hudson, usually possess a considerable admixture of irony."[4] Certainly irony seems an appropriate tone, given the modern setting of The Trial and the total lack of success of the victim-hero. Remember the modifications enjoined in placing Kafka generically: The Trial is significantly lacking in one of the three stages which normally

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[4] John B. Vickery, "The Golden Bough: Impact and Archetype," in Myth and Symbol, ed. Bernice Slote (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1963), p. 179.

comprise the quest-romance. Agon and pathos are clearly present (if not accounted for) in the story, yet anagnorisis is conspicuous in its absence. The Trial may be a quest-romance truncated and turned on its head; it is nevertheless a type of quest-romance. Perhaps it is Joseph K.'s points of contrast to the traditional Grail knight which make him a paradigm of modern man, yet the points of comparison are striking. Unlike the Grail knights of old (and also unlike his two Kafkan brothers, Karl and K.) Joseph K. does not travel into physically "distant lands seeking the goal"[5] of his quest. Rather, his journey takes him into the subterranean passages of the human mind and the labyrinthine garrets of the inscrutable Court: lands distant from Joseph K.'s bourgeois respectability, to be sure. One principal task associated with Grail heroes, dragon-slaying, may also be seen as Joseph K.'s task, if we consider Frye's view of the labyrinth as emblematic of the dragon[6] who has laid waste the kingdom. Without doubt Joseph K. is, in fact, lost in a Waste Land. Olderman's definition of what the term "waste land" implies is also a shrewd perception of Joseph K.'s world:

> In the waste land all energies are inverted and result in death and destruction instead of love, renewal or fulfillment. . . . Wastelanders are characterized by

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[5] Ibid., p. 190.

[6] Frye, Anatomy, p. 190.

> enervating and neurotic pettiness, physical and spiritual sterility and debilitation, an inability to love, yearning and fear-ridden desires. They are sexually inadequate, divided by guilts, alientated, aimless, bored, and rootless; they long for escape and for death. They are immersed in mercantilism and materialism; their lives are vain, artificial, and pointless. . . . They are helpless in the face of a total disintegration of values.Life constantly leads to a reduction of all human dignity; the wastelander becomes idealless and hopeless as he falls prey to false prophets.[7]

Among the false prophets Joseph K. finds especially seductive are the female characters of The Trial. While none of the damsels encountered by Joseph in his quest is as easily allegorized as is the Red Cross Knight's Duessa, all of them--even the kindly Frau Grubach--are penumbral creatures of ambiguous, and possibly insidious, intent. The Chapel Perilous figures even more prominently in Joseph K.'s quest than it does in Karl's: here Joseph receives both his final warning and, perhaps, his death sentence. Instead of obtaining the Grail, Joseph K. finds two of the fixtures of quest-romance, the sword and the stone, used as the means of inflicting a death, the shame of which "must outlive him."[8]

The very implements of Joseph K.'s death evoke images of sacrificial rite. But what redemptive power can be seen in a martyr who transcends mortality only through the shame attached to his death? Joseph K.'s functioning as scapegoat seems to be as gratuitous as is his role of knight errant. The

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[7] Olderman, Waste Land, pp. 11-12.

[8] Kafka, Trial, p. 229.

pointlessness of Joseph K.'s death invests his story with tragic-ironic overtones: K.'s catastrophe is not morally intelligible. As Frye says,

> Irony isolates from the tragic situation the sense of arbitrariness, of the victim's having been unlucky, selected at random or by lot, and no more deserving of what happens to him than anyone else would be. If there is a reason for choosing him for catastrophe, it is an inadequate reason, and raises more objections than it answers.[9]

Granted that Joseph is guilty, we have no evidence that he is guilty in proportion to his punishment. As he himself says, "And, if it comes to that, how can any man be called guilty? We are all simply men here, one as much as the other."[10] But Joseph K. has been singled out for retribution and his being singled out seems to act as confirmation of his guilt. It is difficult to tell whether Joseph's isolation stands as a cause or an effect of his status as pharmakos: however, clearly the pharmakos is cut off from his society and is perceived by that society as a threat and an object of simultaneous fear and fascination. The scapegoat must be isolated in order for his murderers to maintain the emotional distance which enables them mechanically to slaughter a fellow "all too human"[11] being: society's fear of the scapegoat is rooted in the recognition that an arbitrary fate could as easily select one victim as another.

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[9] Frye, Anatomy, p. 41.

[10] Kafka, Trial, p. 210.

[11] Frye, Anatomy, p. 42.

While the reader (like the protagonist) never ascertains precisely why Joseph has been singled out, faintly discernible clues seem to lie in the manner in which the protagonist becomes aware that he has been marked--for what he does not know. Joseph K. seems to have awakened to a nightmare. While still in the dazed, possibly hypnagogic, state which follows sound sleep, K. rings for his breakfast but instead summons a stranger who informs him he is "arrested."[12] Fromm points out the subtle doubleness[13] of the word:

> To be arrested can mean to be taken into custody by police officers and to be arrested can mean to be stopped in one's growth and development. An accused man is "arrested" by the police, and an organism is "arrested" in its normal development. The manifest story uses "arrested" in the former sense. Its symbolic meaning, however, is to be understood in the latter. K. has an awareness that he is arrested and blocked in his own development.[14]

Confronted with the awareness that he is arrested and detached from life, Joseph K.'s instinctive reaction is to protest, "But what for?"[15] He knows of no action which would warrant his being arrested and feels strongly "the necessity to understand his situation clearly."[16] Yet the hallmark of Joseph

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[12] Kafka, Trial, p. 3.

[13] Fromm, himself a speaker of German, fails to mention the German original in his analysis. "Verfahren," which English editions translate as "arrest," does not combine the connotations which the English word does. It is a matter of speculation whether the English "arrest" has served to embody the metaphorical suggestion of Kafka's German.

[14] Fromm, Forgotten Language, p. 250.

[15] Kafka, Trial, p. 3.

[16] Ibid., p. 4.

K.'s present and future struggles against the law is his inability to perceive his situation accurately. Since Joseph K.'s consciousness becomes, in a sense, the reader's consciousness, it is difficult to divorce oneself from the protagonist's perceptions and rationalizations in order to analyze the genesis of Joseph K.'s arrest and ostensible guilt; yet this is precisely what must be done in order to view Joseph K.'s ordeal as anything more than an exercise in absurdity. The account of K.'s habitual manner of passing his free time gives implicit testimony to the nature of his guilt:

> That spring K. had been accustomed to pass his evenings in this way: after work whenever possible--he was usually in his office until nine--he would take a short walk, alone or with some of his colleagues, and then go to a beer hall, where until eleven he sat at a table patronized mostly by elderly men. But there were exceptions to this routine, when, for instance, the Manager of the Bank, who highly valued his diligence and reliability, invited him for a drive or for dinner at his villa. And once a week K. visited a girl called Elsa, who was on duty all night till early morning as a waitress in a cabaret and during the day received her visitors in bed.[17]

It is spring, but spring brings no vitality to Joseph K.'s waste land existence. His beer hall is the gathering place of "elderly men," Joseph K.'s spiritual counterparts. He deviates from his routine only to minister to his standing at the bank and his mechanical sexuality. If it seems precipitate to adjudge this casual nod to Joseph K.'s private

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[17] Ibid., p. 17.

life as damning evidence, one should note that this is almost the only direct reference made to such a private life's even existing. Joseph K. is in the habit of referring to the uncle who was his former guardian as "A ghost from the past."[18] It is not only his uncle whom Joseph K. relates to in this fashion; cut off from his own past and from the deepest part of himself, Joseph K. can only perceive as shadows without substance the emanations from his past and from some more authentic version of his present self. He has devoted himself to the soul-shriveling routine of the bank: whatever in K. is dysfunctional in his capacity as Head Clerk has been jettisoned through the mechanism of repression. As René Dauvin shrewdly apprehends, Joseph K.'s certainty that his arrest could not have overtaken him at his job is an indication that his work at the bank serves to insulate him from the realities of life and the truths of his essential self:[19]

> I was taken by surprise, that was all. If immediately on wakening I had got up without troubling my head . . . in short, if I had behaved sensibly, nothing further would have happened, all this would have been nipped in the bud. But one is so unprepared. In the Bank, for instance, I am always prepared, nothing of that kind could possibly happen to me there, . . . and above all, my mind is always on my work and so kept on the alert.[20]

Joseph K. can only be arraigned at a time when his habitual

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[18] Ibid., p. 92.

[19] René Dauvin, "The Trial: Its Meaning," Kafka Today, p. 146.

[20] Kafka, Trial, pp. 19-20.

defenses are lowered: the lock-step mentality of his workaday world would not admit of any interruption. The question is raised here whether one must look on the external manifestations of Joseph K.'s trial as projections of the victim-hero's unconscious. Although The Trial may be read as a satire of bureaucracy (and certainly life in the late twentieth century has acquainted most readers with the impotence Joseph K. feels in the face of institutionalized illogic) reading The Trial as social-political satire does not account for the visceral response it elicits; discounts the jugular instinct of Kafka's fiction-making. Finally, one must consider Joseph K.'s arrest to be symbolic, and if K. is, as his effaced surname suggests, a kind of Everyman, then his ordeal must be one to which all men are susceptible. The human conscience, or perhaps unconscious, must be the source of Joseph K.'s conviction of isolation and guilt.

If the quest is looked on as the means of righting Joseph K.'s wrong, what end may be posited as the proper object of the quest? Many interpreters, among whom Brod is probably first if not foremost, see The Trial as a religious pilgrimage[21] whose end is unobtained, not necessarily unobtainable, and definitely not non-existent. Such an interpretation has Joseph K. undertaking a quest to justify himself before God. In response to those who view The Trial as a

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[21] Brod, Franz Kafka, p. 50.

religious allegory, Nathan Scott, Jr. asserts that

> . . . to approach this tortured martyr [Kafka] of modern agnosticism as a kind of 'underground' Christian requires an extraordinary nimbleness of sophistry, and such a tucking away of contradictory evidence as has finally robbed all interpretations in this mode of any truly compelling cogency."[22]

Perhaps Scott overstates the case; however, regarding Kafka's literature as allegory is a risky business. Whether or not one considers The Trial to be concerned with religious questions ultimately depends on one's definition of "religious." Clearly Kafka is addressing himself to matters of infinite importance to man: the nature of the universe, the nature of fate, the nature of human guilt. A less problematic explication of Joseph K.'s quest sees the sanction which he seeks as residing in a source not necessarily associated with religious orthodoxy's divinity. Joseph K. seeks to validate his existence without ever knowing exactly who or what is empowered to grant this validation. The High Court may be a metaphor for some absolute or for K.'s own "deepest, unconditional personality"[23]; in either event, Joseph K. is, in a sense, sitting in judgment on himself since, if not for a dim apprehension (at some level of consciousness) of the gulf which yawns between himself and a validated existence, he would never countenance his arrest or pursue his exoneration.

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[22] Nathan A. Scott, Jr. "Kafka's Anguish," Forms of Extremity in the Modern Novel, ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), p. 19.

[23] Dauvin, "The Trial: Its Meaning," Kafka Today, p. 157.

Pursue it he does, although in a manner seemingly calculated to insure conviction rather than exoneration. He decides his arrest may very well be a joke. Ironically, he then decides, "though it was not usual with him to learn from experience,"[24] that he must act prudently in order to avoid any unpleasant consequences of his situation: "if this was a comedy he would insist on playing it to the end."[25] Thus Joseph K. launches himself on his journey as knight errant and into his role as pharmakos. What Vickery says of Grail knights and of Sir James Frazer's quest in The Golden Bough is also true of Joseph K: that he "found himself almost insensibly embarked upon his wanderings."[26] Joseph K. seems almost willfully perverse in his inability to attend properly to his case and to extricate the good advice from the worthless or damaging. Informed by one of his warders that the officials "as the Law decrees, are drawn toward the guilty,"[27] K. refuses to credit either the law or his possible guilt. Instead, "he wanted in some way to enter into the thoughts of the warders and twist them to his own advantage or else try to acclimatize himself to them."[28] K. is equally deaf to the good counsel of the Inspector:

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[24] Kafka, Trial, p. 4.

[25] Ibid., p. 5.

[26] Vickery, "Archetype," Myth and Symbol, p. 190.

[27] Kafka, Trial, p. 6.

[28] Ibid., p. 9.

> "However, if I can't answer your questions, I can at least give you a piece of advice; think less about us and of what is going to happen to you, think more about yourself instead. And don't make such an outcry about your feeling innocent, it spoils the not unfavorable impression you make in other respects."[29]

Instead of examining himself, K. takes offense at the supposed insult served him by the Inspector's remarks. Like the Grail knights, Joseph K. must frame the proper question if he would succeed in his quest. This he never does. K.'s basic premise is his own innocence, and despite the promptings of an unconscious whose message is guilt, K. abandons his intellectual complacency only at the point of death. Even after K. has become apprehensive about the final results of his trial, he fails to consider the most important possibility: that he is not innocent. The question he never asks is the one which might save him, "Am I guilty?" As is typical of him, K. misconceives the crucial question. He says in arguing the inconsequence of his arrest

> "I am accused of something, I cannot recall the slightest offense that might be charged against me. But that even is of minor importance, the real question is, who accuses me? What authority is conducting these proceedings?"[30]

Rather than searching his soul, he attempts to discredit the agency which would call him to account. He looks for answers

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[29] Ibid., p. 12.

[30] Ibid., p. 11.

in the world of the collective Other, seeking to evade or adapt himself to an external authority instead of listening to the interior voice which would tell him that something is very much wrong.

Cut adrift from his essential self and dependent for his self-image on the approval of others, Joseph K. begins his quest with all the presence of mind of an automaton. Because of his inability to assimilate the warders into the construct of his former (that is, his pre-arrest) life, K. decides their presence may be part of an elaborate joke. Despite K.'s early refusal to consider his arrest as anything of consequence, he soon finds that news of his arrest has ushered him into a world very much like the one awaiting Alice behind the looking glass. Cause has become unaccountably divorced from effect; the old rules no longer apply; logic makes no headway against the irrational immovability of everyday life. In David Grossvogel's words, "This is a world in which the familiar gesture fails in its hoped-for effect."[31] The signal which should bring K.'s breakfast instead brings the unwelcome warder and his unspecified accusation. The presentation of his identification papers calls down a rebuke that K. is acting "worse than a child."[32] His attempt to find out the

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[31] David S. Grossvogel, Limits of the Novel: Evolutions of a Form from Chaucer to Robbe-Grillet (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968), p. 174.

[32] Kafka, Trial, p. 6.

charge which has resulted in his arrest yields the news that the Inspector does not even know whether K. is charged with an offense. The rationality which has been K.'s summum bonum has become an anachronism in his postlapsarian experience. He fails to comprehend that his very rationality has been the means through which he has been placed in jeopardy and that none of its machinations will save him. The arrest, which bespoke the dysjuncture between K.'s authentic self and his superficial existence, makes it impossible for him to return to the stamped-out symmetry of his established mode of living. Furthermore, without focusing introspection on the dysjuncture and striving to coalesce his bifurcated selves, K. cannot go forward either. Thus, he is trapped in the Waste Land of his guilty but reflexively defensive consciousness.

The objectification of Joseph K.'s dilemma is the labyrinth in which he gropes for access to the law. In The Trial, as in traditional quest-romance, the labyrinth embodies the danger and sterility of the Waste Land and threatens the knight errant with a scapegoat's death. On the morning when K. answers his first (and only) summons to the court, he takes what proves to be an irreversible first step into the labyrinth:

> He had thought that the house would be recognizable even at a distance by some sign which his imagination left unspecified, or by some unusual commotion before the door. But Juliusstrasse, where the house was said

> to be and at whose end he stopped for a moment, displayed on both sides houses almost exactly alike, high gray tenements inhabited by poor people.[33]

Unaware of the perilous path he has chosen in maintaining and attempting to defend his innocence, "K. penetrated deeper into the street."[34] The labyrinth is insidious in its appearance of yielding to K.'s attempts at progress; it only gives ground to gain a more cruel hold on its victim:

> K. turned toward the stairs to make his way up to the Court of Inquiry, but then came to a standstill again. For in addition to this staircase he could see in the courtyard three other separate flights of stairs and besides these a little passage at the other end which seemed to lead into a second courtyard. He was annoyed that he had not been given more definite information about the room, these people showed a strange negligence or indifference in their treatment of him, he intended to tell them so very positively and clearly. Finally, however, he climbed the first stairs and his mind played in retrospect with the saying of the warder Willem that an attraction existed between the Law and guilt, from which it should really follow that the Court of Inquiry must abut on the particular flight of stairs which K. happened to choose.[35]

K. fails to see the implicit admission of guilt in his reverting to Willem's saying, just as he fails to see the sinister quality of his ostensible success in locating the Court through the imaginery joiner Lanz. Implicit admissions of guilt will not appease the labyrinth, and K. insists on playing his "comedy" to its end. Interpersonal relations take on the

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[33] Ibid., p. 34.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., p. 35.

psychic configurations of the labyrinth as Joseph attempts to win over an audience whose heterogeneity exists only in his mind. Even when the labyrinth leads him into breathless darkness Joseph K. mistakes his predicament for a temporary discomfort; the labyrinth has so thoroughly confounded the hapless quester that he does not even know that he is lost. While visiting the attic offices of the Law Court, K. is overcome by lack of oxygen and exhaustion.

> "I don't want to see everything," said K. who by now felt really tired. "I want to get away, how does one reach the outside door?" "You surely haven't lost your way already?" asked the usher in surprise. "You just go along here to the corner and then turn to the right along the lobby straight to the door." "You come too," said K. "Show me the way, there are so many lobbies here, I'll never find the way." "There's only the one way," said the usher reproachfully.[36]

When a female functionary offers to conduct him to the sick-room K. "particulary wanted to avoid being taken any further, the farther he went the worse it must be for him."[37] Yet Joseph K.'s presentiment of danger vanishes once he encounters the "relatively fresh air"[38] outside the law offices: he mistakes one of the labyrinth's many dead ends for an exit.

The truth of Willem's words is born out by the course of the knight-victim's travels in the maze. He can only learn that an action has a prejudicial effect on his case after he

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[36] Ibid., p. 66.

[37] Ibid., p. 68.

[38] Ibid., p. 73.

has committed the action. A hopeful aspect of his case is revealed to him only after he has "flung away with . . . [his] own hand all the advantages"[39] which might have accrued to him. An uncle who would help because Joseph's arrest constitutes an indictment of his own shallow virtues[40] leads Joseph to a lawyer with a bad heart. The lawyer's convoluted legalisms are effective only in convincing K. that his case must be pursued more energetically than Huld is capable of doing. Huld's encircling logic has seduced Joseph K. deeper into the maze, as his unwonted preoccupation with his case illustrates.

> The contempt which he had once felt for the case no longer obtained. Had he stood alone in the world he could easily have ridiculed the whole affair, though it was also certain that in that event it could never have arisen at all. But now his uncle had dragged him to this lawyer, family considerations had come in, his position was no longer quite independent of the course the case took, . . . --in short, he hardly had the choice now to accept the trial or reject it, he was in the middle of it and must fend for himself. To give in to fatigue would be dangerous.[41]

K. is convinced he must "intervene personally,"[42] a conviction he finds most persuasive when he is giving in to exhaustion. Once again, at a time when his rational guard has dropped, Joseph K.'s true "I" tries to warn him. Yet the

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[39] Ibid., p. 48.

[40] Dauvin, "The Trial: Its Meaning," Kafka Today, p. 154.

[41] Kafka, Trial, p. 126.

[42] Ibid.

overly-rational K. garbles the message; his "personal intervention" will be merely a separate pursuit of the non-existent legal loophole sought by Huld. But K. seems to be denied even the tentative freedom of movement in the corridors of the Law which Huld possesses:

> What a stupor had overcome him, merely because he had decided to conduct his own defense! And what would develop later on? What days were lying in wait for him? Would he ever find the right path through all these difficulties?[43]

Joseph K. has for so long sought endorsement and support through the Other, that he is paralyzed when he assumes responsibility for himself. The crucial responsibility, the burden of his inauthentic life, he still evades through asking irrelevant questions about his fate. K.'s obsessive involvement with his case has even undermined his ability to negotiate the surface level of his life, his post at the bank; nevertheless, he persists in the empty charade of his vocational commitments. While torturing himself with the incompatibility of the apparent demands of the Court and the Bank, Joseph reflects that "It might be that he was only sapping his powers of resistance by harboring these thoughts; still, it was necessary to have no illusions and to view the position as clearly as the moment allowed."[44] Despite his resolution to be clear-sighted, Joseph fails to see the hidden significance in the manufacturer's interruption of his

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[43] Ibid., p. 133.

[44] Ibid., p. 134.

musings. "An awful autumn" portends the coming of winter and perhaps the sacrifice of the scapegoat, but in Joseph K.'s solipsistic universe the seasons are as meaningless as the manufacturer's words. When his visitor offers him a possible source of outside help in Titorelli, however, Joseph K.--at first disheartened and then doubtful of his own powers of perception--rushes to Titorelli although his doing so compromises him at the Bank.

Titorelli's tenement is "almost at the diametrically opposite end of the town from the office of the Court,"[45] but the opposition is only illusory. K.'s tortuous ascent to the painter's room is reminiscent of his meandering search for the Court of Inquiry and, in fact, Titorelli belongs to the Court. In the manner of Grail knights, Joseph K. encounters weird creatures along his path; a "girl, who was slightly hunchbacked and seemed scarcely thirteen years old, nudged him with her elbow and peered up at him knowingly. Neither her youth nor her deformity had saved her from being prematurely debauched."[46] This anomalous being, instead of threatening the hero's access to his goal, actually serves to guide him to it: "Thanks to her, he was able to make straight for the right door."[47] Normally one accepts a figure who

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[45] Ibid., p. 141.

[46] Ibid., p. 142.

[47] Ibid.

helps the hero pursue his quest as a benign agency; in this case one has reservations.

Titorelli's rendering of Justice appears to K. "exactly like a goddess of the Hunt in full cry."[48] Joseph K.'s gathering anxiety over his condition and his persistent inability to prove himself before an external authority have combined in his paranoid sense of victimization. Because of his feeling of helplessness K. even begins to hope that Titorelli may be instrumental to him because of his "unrecognized influence": "That made the painter an excellent recruit to the ring of helpers which K. was gradually gathering round him."[49] This "excellent recruit" excels even Huld's ability for circumlocution, and that without ever having read the Law. The objects of Titorelli's proffered assistance are definite acquittal, ostensible acquittal, or indefinite postponement: the first exists only in legends and the latter two confer only the illusion of freedom.[50] The artist deals only in appearances--he is the "merchant of illusions." Joseph K.'s suffering cannot be assuaged through art: Life-at-one-remove, life through art, cannot lift the existential burden. Titorelli has been merely another wrong turn in Joseph K.'s quest.

Gradually the walls of the labyrinth begin to close in on Joseph K. It is not that he is unable to pursue a path through

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[48] Ibid., p. 147.

[49] Ibid., p. 151.

[50] Dauvin, "The Trial: Its Meaning," Kafka Today, p. 154.

his puzzling surroundings. His progress is swift. It is his chosen path which is deadly. Seeking external validation of "a self-image that never existed beyond his own unexamined illusion,"[51] Joseph K. finds the surest means of sealing himself off from the redemption which can only come through an existential awakening. The Kafkan knight errant, like more traditional questers, must frame the requisite question; Joseph K.'s failure to do so renders his quest futile. His frenzied pursuit of a power which exists only in his own mind (the last place he would look for it) finds him ricocheting from hopeless despair to groundless optimism. Constantly attuned to news of his case he nevertheless fails to hear the absurdity of the information he devours. Block tells him first that "combined action against the Courts is impossible,"[52] and moments later that "the only pointless thing is to try taking independent action."[53] K.'s response to this nonsense is to beg that Block "speak more slowly, all these things are very important to me and I can't follow so quickly."[54] When given invaluable counsel Joseph K. remains uninstructed. The priest warns him, "You cast about too much for outside help. . . . especially from women. Don't you see it isn't the right kind of help?"[55] Even when his obtuse arguments force the

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[51] Szanto, Narrative Consciousness, p. 21.

[52] Kafka, Trial, p. 175.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., p. 211.

priest to cry out in horror at K.'s headlong self-destruction, K. does not hear the alarm. Finally, apprehending that death is his destination, K. is incapable of finding it for himself but must be lead by his executioners. He finally penetrates the center of his self-constructed labyrinth.

Women, like the labyrinth, often constitute a trial of the chivalric hero's valor and virtue. Women are no less a test of the hero's powers in The Trial. The world of The Trial is populated by female figures almost uniformly mysterious and threatening. René Dauvin associates Kafka's evocative females with "the repressed demonic forces that threaten daily life"[56] but which may, at the same time, offer a hope of salvation. Judging him from his approach-avoidance relationships with women, Joseph K. seems to perceive both of these potentialities in the female. He hopes to draw on the special power he attributes to women, yet fears that it may be turned against him. Kafka's mysterious females have implications for both of Joseph K.'s archetypal roles. Since it is his own sense of inauthenticness which has condemned Joseph K. (although he projects the action of his own consciousness onto a kind of arch-institution) he is, literally, his own scapegoat. Denying any wrongdoing does not lessen, and perhaps

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[56] Dauvin, "The Trial: Its Meaning," Kafka Today, p. 153.

heightens, a growing sense of guilt which he can neither avoid nor confront. Finally, unable to endure the self-hate which has grown from his isolated and fragmented existence, Joseph K. sacrifices what he considers an innocent victim, himself. It is striking that,in his relationships with women, K. receives what he views as confirmation of his guilt. Perhaps his unconscious, aware of their disruptive effect, attempts to make women allies against K.'s "death-in-life"[57] existence, but effective communication with the living dead is impossible and Joseph K. can only misgive himself in every man-woman relationship. In the context of quest-romance, one would expect women to fall into two camps: those who aid the hero in his quest and those who hinder him. Joseph's women seem to belong to neither one camp nor the other, or perhaps to both. While a traditional Grail knight must safeguard his chastity, Joseph K. cannot escape his sterility. Even while responding to the sexual appeal of Fräulein Bürstner, the washerwoman, or Leni, he fails to reach out from the deepest level of his being: all sexual encounters remain as depersonalized as his weekly appointment with Elsa.

In his relations with Fräulein Bürstner, K. is consistent in nothing but his equivocation. He makes an oblique criticism of the fraulein to Frau Grubach and elicits a judgment on the girl's character. Instantly defensive, K. champions the girl

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[57] Szanto, Narrative Consciousness, p. 36.

heatedly but breaks off in mid-argument. When the landlady attempts to conciliate him, he retorts, "Respectable! . . . if you want to keep your house respectable you'll have to begin by giving me notice."[58] Is this the self-justifying Joseph K. of that morning's arrest? He condemns himself for whatever guilt attaches to Fräulein Bürstner. K. is so far out of touch with his feelings that he senses no contradiction in the thought that, "He felt no special desire to see her [Fräulein Bürstner], he could not even remember exactly how she looked, but he wanted to talk to her now and he was exasperated that her being so late should further disturb and derange the end of such a day."[59] When she finally arrives he calls to her in a voice that sounds as if he is praying; a dim intuition informs K. that human contact may banish the strangeness that invaded his world with the warders. While others cannot complete K.'s quest for him, an empathic relationship with another might show him the way to himself. However, while holding the awaited conversation with Fräulein Bürstner K. can concentrate neither on the girl nor on his arrest as one seems to contaminate the other. He feels he must vindicate himself in her eyes by explaining away the events of the morning, but is distracted by her latent sexuality. He even goes so far as literally to forget himself

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[58] Kafka, Trial, p. 22.

[59] Ibid., p. 23.

while re-enacting the Court of Inquiry for her benefit. A voice from the next room frightens Fräulein Bürstner and prompts K.'s offer to defend her by confessing to have assaulted her. One suspects a parallel between K.'s proffered defense and his subliminal desires. Again K. debases himself out of guilt feelings touched off by the fräulein. The trial, after all, begins in Fräulein Bürstner's room. If one interprets the arrest to be Joseph K.'s realization of the gulf which separates him from both the rest of humanity and his own existential self, it may be that Joseph's first glimpse of this gulf has appeared in the context of his failed love relationships. The unsatisfactory nature of such relationships contributes to K.'s sense of isolation and his sense of guilt. Fräulein Bürstner, as is shown by the trial's originating in her room, has been a means of revealing to K. his radical estrangement from authentic life. The second woman clearly associated with the progress of K.'s trial is the washerwoman who ushers Joseph K. into the Court of Inquiry.

The washerwoman, more overtly and accessibly sexual than Fräulein Bürstner, is recognized by K., from the moment of her entrance into the courtroom, "as a potential cause of disturbance."[60] Her presence elicits the anticipated disturbance at the moment when K. is most convinced of his ability to manipulate the audience to his own ends. When one of the woman's

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[60] Ibid., p. 46.

admirers cries out, he disrupts K.'s oratory, robbing it of its momentum and K. of his certainty of success. Has the woman been the means of negating the advantages K.'s defense had won for him, or has she served to divert K. from a perilous over-confidence? It is characteristic of his dealings with women that Joseph K. cannot decide: "Whether she was at fault now or not, one could not tell."[61] Nevertheless, when he returns to the Court and finds it empty, K. endeavors to obtain the woman's help. As he invariably does with women, K. assumes that female intercession will confer some unspecified but decisive benefit. But the lawbooks the woman displays for K. reveal nothing but clumsy obscenities and an oblique comment on the corruption of the judges they serve. The lawbooks also evidently alter K.'s opinion of the washerwoman, for he now reacts to her offer of assistance by thinking:

> "So this is all it amounts to, . . . she's offering herself to me, she's corrupt like the rest of them, she's tired of the officials here, which is understandable enough, and accosts any stranger who takes her fancy with compliments about his eyes.[62]

Despite his slighting estimate of the woman's character, however, K. determines to secure her for himself and thus revenge himself upon the Examining Magistrate. His determination to do so brings about "the first unequivocal defeat that he had received from these people."[63] K. responds to the woman at a visceral level yet he insists on putting a rational face on

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., p. 52.

[63] Ibid., p. 58.

the matter:

> She gave K.'s hand a last caress, jumped up, and ran to the window. Despite himself K.'s hand reached out after hers in the empty air. The woman really attracted him, and after mature reflection he could find no valid reason why he should not yield to that attraction.[64]

K's logic and his sexual impulses are at cross-purposes; perhaps their being so partially explains his inability to win the woman. Further, it is a pre-rational impulse which acts to inform K. that he has been defeated. Certainly he has already experienced other defeats in the course of his trial, yet they have not been regarded as such since only K.'s inflexible rationality has been involved with them. A non-rational response is required to put K. in touch with the reality of his situation. When he encounters the woman's husband, K. questions the woman's opposition to being carried to the Magistrate; "he had to keep a grip on himself while asking this, he still felt so jealous."[65] K.'s self-image is so fragile, his grasp of his identity so tenuous, that he perceives the woman's defection as a dimunition of his worth. He hopes to possess women in more than a sexual sense, seeking to shore up his solitary and endangered self through the acquisition of another body. Yet, K.'s subconscious feelings of guilt make even a true physical possession impossible since Joseph K. is incapable of giving himself as he must if he were

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[64] Ibid., p. 56.

[65] Ibid., p. 61.

to achieve intimacy.

Although Joseph K. has not clearly conceived the true object of his quest, he is seeking a redemptive mode of being. His attempts to transcend builty mortality are closely connected with the burden of guilt which, in turn, is closely connected with human sexuality. Solomon J. Spiro links Kafka's own feelings of guilt concerning sex and the burden of existential guilt with which K., as all men, is encumbered.[66] Of this nexus between guilt and sex he says, "Though sex undoubtedly is a source of guilt, it paradoxically remains the prime retreat into which mankind creeps to escape the very burden of guilt it engenders."[67] In light of this view, Leni may be seen as a purely sexual escape which proves to be yet another kind of trap. Leni remains as unamenable to definitive analysis as she is amenable to K.'s sexual desires. It is never clear to the reader or to Joseph K. whether she seeks to prove K. innocent or to render K. submissive to her employer. Having detected K.'s attraction to her, Leni summons him from his first interview with Huld by making a commotion outside the lawyer's room. She tells K.:

> "Don't be so unyielding in future, you can't fight against this Court, you must confess to guilt. Make your confession at the first chance you get. Until you do that, there's no possibility of getting out of their

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[66] Solomon J. Spiro, "Verdict--Guilty! A Study of The Trial," Twentieth Century Literature, 17 (July, 1971), 172.

[67] Ibid.

> clutches, none at all. Yet even then you won't manage it without help from outside, but you needn't trouble your head about that, I'll see to it myself."[68]

Her urging K. to admit his guilt may be potentially valuable advice, but is one to believe her offer of intercession is made in good faith? Leni's favors merely underscore Block's abjectness while her bestowal of sexual favors on K. is said to have badly damaged K.'s case, "which was beginning to go quite well."[69] While submitting to Leni's enticements, K. reflects "I seem to recruit women helpers . . . first Fräulein Bürstner, then the wife of the usher, and now this little nurse."[70] His tendency to regard women as helpers has little to do with whether or not the women in question are, in fact, of any help. As Leni herself says, everyone "here" is madly vain, "But I am a vain person, too."[71] It is in vain that K. seeks comforting physical contact and effective legal advice from Leni: his preoccupation with his case diverts his attention from her sexuality while his preoccupation with her sexuality diverts his attention from his case. Leni's "physical defect" identifies her as a kind of personification of human sexual nature; she is slightly bestial, perhaps atavistic, yet all the more attractive for her piquant singularity. Possibly her primitivism possesses her of truths which K.'s hypertrophied intellect cannot articulate. For example, when K.

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[68] Kafka, Trial, pp. 108-109.

[69] Ibid., p. 111.

[70] Ibid., p. 109.

[71] Ibid., p. 108.

informs Leni that he must conduct the Italian through the Cathedral, Leni responds, "They're goading you."[72] Leni's intuition sounds K.'s as-yet-unspoken fear. A broken telephone connection sylbolically ends the depersonalized, remote relationship which obtains between K. and Leni, a relationship which has been further depersonalized by Leni's indiscriminate attraction to accused men. As Huld tells K., "It's a remarkable phenomenon, almost a natural law"[73] that all accused men are attractive. Why should this be? Is it merely that an accused man attracts what he seeks, and what he seeks is a means of escaping, even if temporarily, the consciousness of his own guilt and isolation? His need is both attractive and insatiable.

Women, at least a specific woman, plays a crucial role in K.'s death scene. Despite K.'s comment that "Fraulein Burstner had no connection with the case,"[74] the appearance of Fraulein Burstner, or of a woman who looks enough like her to satisfy K., makes him suddenly aware of "the futility of resistance."[75] The girl whom K. had "courted fruitlessly"[76] embodies the unbroken line of failures which K.'s every attempt to evade the Law has become. The victim-hero comes as close as he is capable to completing the circle which began in Fraulein Burstner's room. The circle remains broken because K.

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[72] Ibid., p. 203.

[72] Ibid., p. 183.

[74] Ibid., p. 98.

[75] Ibid., p. 225.

[76] Jerry Bryant, "The Delusion of Hope: Franz Kafka's The Trial," Symposium, 23 (1969), 124.

fails to make the mental connection which would bring him full circle--he never comprehends the nature of the Court or the reality of his existential guilt.

The Cathedral in which K. forfeits his penultimate chance for enlightenment and salvation may be likened to the Chapel Perilous in which a Grail knight must keep his vigil. True to his literal-minded nature, Joseph K. never apprehends that strange and compelling powers have summoned him to the Cathedral; he persists in his belief that his true mission is "to show an Italian round the Cathedral."[77] The sight-seeing album with which K. equips himself indicates that he views himself as an on-looker only: presumably a prayer book would be a far more appropriate talisman for one in K.'s position. As if making a tacit comparison between the Grail knights of old and the unheroic Joseph K., the likeness of a knight in full armour seems to draw K.'s attention to itself:

> The first thing K. perceived, partly by guess, was a huge armored knight on the outermost verge of the picture. He was leaning on his sword, which was stuck into the bare ground, bare except for a stray blade of grass or two. He seemed to be watching attentively some event unfolding before his eyes. It was surprising that he should stand so still without approaching nearer to it. Perhaps he had been set there to stand guard. K., who had not seen any pictures for a long time, studied this knight for a good while, although the greenish light of the oil-lamp made his eyes blink. When he played the torch over the rest of the altarpiece he discovered that it was a portrayal of Christ being laid in the tomb, conventional in style and a fairly recent painting. He pocketed the torch and returned again to his seat.[78]

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[77] Kafka, Trial, p. 210.

[78] Ibid., p. 205.

The image of the knight together with the altarpiece bespeaks the travesty of Christ's martyrdom in the sacrifice of Joseph K. It is as if the Cathedral had been designed for no other purpose than to impress K. with his own puny finitude. The immense proportions of the church strike K. as "bordering on the limit of what human beings could bear."[79] It is while pondering this thought that he hears the priest's intonation of his name, "Joseph K.!"[80] This cry echoes K.'s pronouncement of his own name while re-enacting the Court of Inquiry for Fräulein Bürstner. Perhaps in the Cathedral, as in the girl's room, it is K. who calls out his own name in such a way that it becomes an indictment. Yet K., alienated from any part of himself not governed by reason, interprets the recriminations of his guilty subconscious to be the voice of a recognizable authority. Although it is stated that K.'s acknowledging the call would indicate his readiness to obey, he is not ready, nor perhaps able, to obey. K. does not truly acknowledge the voice which summons him, but merely gives in to idle curiosity about "what the priest was doing."[81] When informed by the priest that his guilt is taken for granted, K. argues his humanity as proof of a kind of relative innocence. His humanity is, paradoxically, the source of both his guilt

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[79] Ibid., p. 209.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

and his innocence, yet K. fails to perceive this paradox. The priest provides K. with the most valuable information he has encountered in his quest, but educating K. is a futile task. He remains unenlightened: even the portentous lowering of the elements, as if by sympathetic magic, does not alert K.'s instincts of self-preservation:

> What fearful weather there must be outside! There was no longer even a murky daylight; black night had set in. All the stained glass in the great window could not illumine the darkness of the wall with one solitary glimmer of light.[82]

The foolishly rational K. still believes a bargain may be struck with the priest whereby K. may escape his trial altogether. The priest, as if intuiting Joseph K.'s hopes of ingratiating himself, tells K. that he is deluded and then illustrates the delusion with the parable of the man before the Law. The parable is even more concentrated and evocative than is the surrounding text of The Trial and explicating the parable, while discounting its complexities, can never fully explain them. As Bryant remarks:

> The fable becomes the equivalent of reality, an object to be perceived and discussed, but lacks a final explanation of its ultimate truth. . . . K. interprets the story, just as he attempts to interpret the events of his life and the imponderables of the Court, and he meets with the same confusions. He assumes the story has a meaning, and this meaning derives from his own experience. . . . No single interpretation can define what the story "really" means, for it does not mean anything. It simply is.[83]

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[82] Ibid., p. 211.

[83] Bryant, "Delusion of Hope," pp. 119-120.

According to Bryant the priest's careful elucidation of co-existing but seemingly contradictory interpretations of the parable reflects his

> . . . commitment to the relativity of knowledge. Lacking the perspective of relative knowledge, K. . . . makes the error of insisting upon a 'correct' interpretation of the story to the exclusion of others. The story--like the Court, like reality--is inaccessible to the categories of finality with which K. approaches it. The legend can never "be" what K. or the commentators say it is. It can only "be" in the existent sense.[84]

The priest's parable, had K. grasped its lesson, might have disabused him of the delusion that the same mode of knowledge which characterized K.'s grip on his pre-trial life could also be applied to the world of the Court.[85] Had K. foresaken his quest for absolutes and directed himself toward an existential course of self-discovery he might have replaced an illusory goal with a realizable one. But he does not. The priest's analyses exhaust him.

> He was too tired to survey all the conclusions arising from the story, and the trains of thought into which it was leading him were unfamiliar, dealing with impalpabilities better suited to a theme for discussion among Court officials than for him. The simple story had lost its clear outline, he wanted to put it out of his mind, and the priest, who now showed great delicacy of feeling, suffered him to do so and accepted his comment in silence, although undoubtedly he did not agree with it.[86]

K.'s moral darkness seems to be all the more complete after the priest's vain attempt to unseal his sight. The lamp

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[84] Ibid., p. 120.

[85] Ibid., p. 121.

[86] Kafka, Trial, pp. 220-221.

given K. by the priest has gone out in his hand and K. is "ignorant of his whereabouts. The silver image of some saint once glimmered into sight immediately before him, by the sheen of its own silver, and was instantaneously lost in the darkness again."[87] Once again a Christian-heraldic symbol serves to emphasize the ironic discrepancy between itself and the victim-hero K. Indicating his total lack of comprehension, K. avers that he must return to the Bank, that he only came to the Cathedral in behalf of the Bank. Since K. is lost, the priest directs him to the exit, but K. is reluctant to dismiss the priest and calls him back to ask, "Don't you want anything more from me?"[88] The priest's cryptic response is that he belongs to the Court and therefore, like the Court who "receives you when you come and . . . dismisses you when you go,"[89] wants nothing of him. What are the implications of the priest's final words (not that Joseph K. ever asks himself that question)? Does he allude to life's utter indifference to the being who must attempt to invest his existence with meaning? Or perhaps his words refer to the Court's being a projection of K.'s own consciousness. If the Court only exists as Joseph K.'s insistence on rendering his intuitive sense of guilt familiar by attributing it to an external agency's condemnation of him, the Court can only

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[87] Ibid., p. 221.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., p. 222.

exist in a passive relationship to its creator. K. convicts himself--he is not summoned by a "Court" in his understanding of the word. In a sense, K. also places himself under the sentence which he believes will put him outside the reach of the Court.

K.'s functions as knight errant and as scapegoat come together in the final chapter. By the end of the crucial year that marks his trial, K. has reached an impasse in the labyrinth. Failing to avail himself of the possibility for redeeming his life, he has reached the point of being prepared to sacrifice it. He asks none of the questions put to his original warders of the two men who are to lead him to his death. The darkness and isolation which characterize K.'s last journey are the culmination and essence of his year-long trial. Babies vainly reaching out to each other through the bars of a tenement window suggest the universality of K.'s imprisoning loneliness. Although K. does not offer resistance, his attendants nevertheless fasten on to him in a fashion

> . . . he had never before experienced. They kept their shoulders close behind his and, instead of crooking their elbows, wound their arms round his at full length, holding his hands in a methodical, practiced, irresistible grip. K. walked rigidly between them, the three of them were interlocked in a unity which would have brought all three down together had one of them been knocked over. It was a unity such as can hardly be formed except by lifeless matter.[90]

K.'s death-in-life existence has assumed an almost corpselike rigidity at this point, yet a kind of dogged, mechanical hope

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[90] Ibid., p. 224.

still seems to animate Joseph K. He tests out his ability to dominate his warders and finds that they halt when he does. Flexing his moral muscles, K. maintains he will not be moved but will rather direct his remaining powers to opposing his executioners. But K.'s intransigence is fleeting. The stubborn tenacity which has marked K.'s struggles before the Law deserts him in his final pitched battle. An image of the self-destructive and doomed struggles of a trapped insect comes to K. Despite his determination to resist his fate, K. looks on his struggles as pathetic and ignoble, as the analogy he perceives between himself and the fly suggests. The image of the fly "precedes but does not explicitly cause a complete change of mind about his resistance. The change is triggered when a figure resembling Fräulein Bürstner . . . appears on the path ahead."[91] The familiar figure reinforces K.'s sense of the inauthenticity of his life and of the fruitlessness of his every effort to escape the trap of his own consciousness. He now relizes that "to snatch at the last appearance of life by struggling"[92] would be purposeless. Not only his warders, but even K. himself, experiences a measure of relief with his resignation to play out his "comedy"--as if submission absolves K. of the burden his freedom engenders. Still clinging to his rational defenses, he resolves to remain lucid as if doing so will win him some degree of control over what is

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[91] Bryant, "Delusion of Hope," p. 124.

[92] Kafka, Trial, p. 225.

happening to him.

> "'The only thing I can do now,' he told himself, and the regular correspondence between his steps and the steps of the other two confirmed his thought, 'the only thing for me to go on doing is to keep my intelligence calm and analytical to the end.'"[93]

Next to his unavailing death, perhaps the greatest irony of K.'s trial is that, faced with his ultimate chance of recognition and redemption, K. persists in his deluded faith in those critical faculties which have crippled him. He draws a meretricious comfort from the correspondences he still imposes on experience in his mad pursuit to arrange reality into tidy patterns and closed sets. Solomon Spiro implies that K.'s rationality finally forces him to adduce an offence which, by testifying to his guilt, will render his death less absurd.[94] Driven by his insatiable need for rationality, K. condemns himself for having "snatch[ed] at the world with twenty hands."[95] Unwilling to show that his trial has demonstrated nothing to him, that he is a man without "common sense"[96] K. condemns himself on a pretext in order to rationalize his acceptance of death. He does not apprehend the true source and nature of his guilt. Trapped by his old modes of thought he can only understand his sense of guilt if he can posit

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Spiro, "Verdict--Guilty!" p. 178.

[95] Kafka, Trial, p. 225.

[96] Ibid., p. 226.

some transgression. The sin of omission which has been his life and the anxiety which is an inescapable portion of his humanity are the crucial issues in K.'s case, yet are precisely the issues K. never contemplates.

Intent upon his death, K. propels himself and his warders away from the possible intervention of a policeman. Quickly they arrive at the moonlit stone quarry where K. the pharmakos will be sacrificed on a boulder. The quarry is deserted and one feels that the practice of sacrifice has fallen into disuse. The appointed executioners are ill-at-ease with this task and clumsy even in their attempts to make K. comfortable. They can neither spare K.'s humiliation and pain nor invest his death with the meaning of sacred ritual. They have no faith in their office and would only too gladly pass their obligation onto K. The scapegoat is actually meant to sacrifice himself. Yet, K.'s lack of compliance is not an act of rebellion but merely a failure of nerve and strength, a failure he characteristically blames on some vague, external power. K. has actually hastened to his death, yet he fails to actively inflict it. Perhaps doing so would be an instance of K.'s giving meaning to his life, even in death, through self-assertion. K. remains physically passive, while mentally he still snatches with twenty hands at the illusory hope that seems to beckon from a nearby window:

> Who was it? A friend? A good man? Someone who sympathized? Someone who wanted to help? Was it one person only? Or was it mankind? Was help at hand? Were there arguments in his favor that had been overlooked? Of course there must be. Logic is doubtless unshakable, but it cannot withstand a man who wants to go on living. Where was the Judge whom he had never seen? Where was the high Court, to which he had never penetrated?[97]

K.'s fantasies of outside intervention are ended by the twisting of a knife in his heart and the slashing of his throat. His final words bespeak the gratuitousness of his death and the total absence of anagnorisis: "'Like a dog!' . . . as if the shame of it must outlive him."[98]

As Spiro maintains, a sense of guilt which is experienced but never resolved or obliterated in one's lifetime outlives one because the guilt has not been remitted in life.[99] K. had imagined that death would absolve him of guilt and place him forever beyond the jurisdiction of the Court. Yet death brings K. no sense of release, but merely a final awareness of the sordid smallness of his life and death. A being not redeemed in life remains unredeemed in death. The blood of the scapegoat flows in vain, since every man must work out his own redemption in his lifetime. The quest has failed because the knight never asked the necessary question of himself.

All this is to say that Joseph K.'s fate is not preordained, that K.'s quest for justification is a failure, not an

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[97] Ibid., p. 228.

[98] Ibid., p. 229.

[99] Spiro, "Verdict--Guilty!" p. 178.

impossibility. Spiro believes Rollo May's theories of human anxiety illuminate a way in which Kafka's victim-hero/Everyman might have saved himself: "Cure is no longer viewed as relief from symptoms of anxiety, but rather a use of anxiety to define the patient's own existence--to accept it as a comcommitant of being."[100] Jerry Bryant posits two other possible modes of salvation for K. He might have abandoned his search for absolutes and acknowledged the void as the source "out of which all things may grow,"[101] and thus become an absurd hero. Or, a related course, he might have transcended the paradox of the absurd through becoming a Kirkegaardian knight of faith. However:

> K. is not the absurd hero or the knight of faith. Yet for this very reason he is more representatively "modern" than either. Like all men, K., is faced with the bafflement of existence; like all men he tries to understand it. He wants his world to be one thing but finds it another. He cannot relinquish his grip upon the explainable of his familiar world. Nor can he fully grasp the strangeness of his new one. The knight of faith and the absurd hero embrace the paradox of the absurd. Joseph K. lives in anxiety the modern experience, persisting in a hope which is barren of fruit.[102]

K.'s barren hope is not "absurd faith." "It is what Kirkegaard calls the 'caricature of faith,' 'the miserable lukewarm

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[100] Ibid., p. 176.

[101] Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, The Modern Tradition, eds. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 844.

[102] Bryant, "Delusion of Hope," p. 128.

indolence . . . the pitiful hope which says, "One cannot know what is going to happen . . . it might possibly be after all" . . .'"[103]

Bryant is only one of the many who see Joseph K. as paradigmatic of modern man. Yet it is specifically K.'s inability to avail himself of the redemptive modes of being (absurd hero and knight of faith) which Bryant sees as marking K.'s modernity. Is Bryant, perhaps unconsciously, referring to a paradox which Kafka consciously built into his hero's trial? K. is faced with a sense of guilt which can only be stripped of its destructive powers if it is acknowledged and understood. He is guilty of an inauthentic, meaningless life which can only be redeemed through the existential process itself. These are the keys to K.'s projected salvation. Can it be that these keys are not as accessible to the one who must seize them as they appear to be to one who is a detached observer of the victim-hero's struggle? The priest's statement that "the proceedings only gradually merge into the verdict"[104] is essentially another rendering of Novalis's pronouncement that character is fate. Perhaps for men of certain character (perhaps for all men?) the existential process is the means which makes the redemptive end unattainable.

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[103] Ibid.

[104] Kafka, Trial, p. 211.

CHAPTER IV

THE REDEMPTIVE QUEST

In his last novel Kafka reduces the truncated name of The Trial's protagonist to three pen strokes: the single letter "K" is sufficient for The Castle's victim-hero. One might infer, not only that these two protagonists with the same abbreviated surname are kinsmen, but that the latter, by virtue of his reductive appellative, is but a diminished version of Joseph K. Such an inference has no basis in textual support, however. Surprisingly enough, K. is a rare creature in the most unlikely of places, a hero in a Kafka novel. True, K. is no Galahad, but neither is he the twin of his Kafkan brother Joseph K. His world is very like Joseph's; his response to that world is not. Like Joseph, K. is a knight errant seeking a kind of cosmic sanction of his existence. Simultaneously he is the scapegoat who is blamed for the calamities that befall those around him. But there is a crucial difference between Joseph's and K.'s enactments of their archetypal roles. While Joseph K. fails in his quest and goes to his slaughter like an eager lamb, K. wrests an uneasy victory and adamantly refuses to be sacrificed. Where Joseph K. is incurably blind to the truth of his situation, K. is ultimately capable of extracting a lesson from his

experience. Nevertheless, K. initially appears to be as hopelessly overmatched by hostile surroundings as do Karl and Joseph K.

K.'s reception in the village calls to mind the inhospitality shown to another knight errant, Jesus Christ. For K., too, there is no room in the inn and a bed of straw must make do. But his right even to this makeshift accommodation is soon questioned. Apparently one must have a permit to enjoy the privilege of sleep in this village, and K. has no such document. In the space of slightly more than one page, Kafka has plunged both protagonist and reader into the nightmare world that is a travesty of prior experience and expectations, and the special province of Kafka. The opening paragraph crystallizes the bleak and deceptive atmosphere into which K. has journeyed.

> It was late in the evening when K. arrived. The village was deep in snow. The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village, K. stood for a long time gazing into the illusory emptiness above him.[1]

Darkness, mist, and snow enshroud the countryside and impair K.'s perception. Kafka's "illusory emptiness," surely one of literature's most deliberately ambiguous couplings of adjective and noun, summarizes K.'s imminent dilemma: that everyone knows there is a Castle and that K. has no tangible proof that

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[1] Franz Kafka, The Castle, trans. by Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1958), p. 3.

everyone is right. Is it the appearance of emptiness, or the ascription of content to the void that constitutes the illusion? K. has traveled (or has he merely stumbled?) into a Waste Land where the winters are very long indeed.[2] The snow hinders K.'s movement and enervates him; not only the snow prevents his gaining a secure footing, however. The stranger finds he can make no headway where his assumptions about how to negotiate reality are shared by no one. K.'s certainties are seen by the villagers as perverse or ignorant delusions. The reader's certainties are even fewer and more threatened than are K.'s, for K. himself may well be lying. Informed that he is an interloper in the village, K. counters that he is the Land-Surveyor engaged by the Count. Actually he says, "Let me tell you that I am the Land-Surveyor whom the Count is expecting."[3] Could his choice of words be a clever, if slightly childish, attempt to circumlocute a direct lie?

Yet what hope could prompt K. to set himself up as Land-Surveyor? And why would the Castle's acknowledging him--albeit in what proves to be a substanceless fashion--as what he claims to be make "his skin prickle"?[4] The answer lies

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[2] Ibid., p. 407.

[3] Ibid., p. 5.

[4] Ibid., p. 8.

in the tension which obtains between the two equally urgent and mutually exclusive goals, individuality and integration, which are the immediate objects of K.'s quest. The paradox at the heart of the quest is that the individual may obtain his rights only from within the community, yet the community tends to destroy the individual through absorption and control. Only through the Castle's withheld but constantly beckoning approval can K. hope to achieve the status and identity which would enable him to attain the necessities of an ordered, secure existence. Lacking the official seal of approval, K. will remain a human cipher, a peripheral, anomalous being who cannot deal on an equal basis with the other villagers nor enjoy even the illusion of safety. As all men do, K. feels the necessity of insuring his physical and social survival through establishing a legitimate, inalienable position in the community. Denied access to such a position, K. is subject to all the dangers of a chaotic, amorphous non-identity. Ironically, achievement of a Castle-approved position also includes dangers. If the Castle is seen as the sum total of man's societal, religious, and political institutions, the danger of being embraced by this ultimate collective Other is that one may also be swallowed. In striving for official recognition of his identity K. is courting a possible loss of identity in any personal sense.

Despite the Castle's cavalier treatment of K., he is by no means alone in attaching importance to his struggles. Although K. cannot achieve contact with Klamm, all those whom K. does come in contact with are deeply interested in the success or failure of K.'s efforts. He is looked on both as a knight-hero and a scapegoat by the various villagers. The outcast Barnabas family looks on him as a possible saviour while certain others regard him with a fascination compounded of roughly equal measures of fear and attraction. Still others adjudge K. responsible for any deviation of events from their expected course--such deviations being the greatest evil imaginable to minds totally in accord with the Castle. The teacher is perhaps first among those who are quick to condemn K. K. himself is aware that conforming too strictly to the teacher's designs for him would result in his becoming "the teacher's slave and scapegoat."[5] In their diverse and often equivocal attitudes toward K. the villagers exhibit the complex and highly charged response elicited by one who is both knight errant and scapegoat. K. is both of these to the villagers, but never to himself: only the role of quester is acknowledged by K. Aware that there are those who would all-too-willingly sacrifice him to the ritual death of non-inclusion, even at times beset by a sense of victimization, K., nevertheless, refuses to play the martyr's role that Joseph K. meekly--almost thankfully--accepts.

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[5] Ibid., p. 199.

An arbitrary fate is the lot of the scapegoat, no less so for the knight errant. Indeed, if fate is arbitrary, then arbitrariness is every man's portion in life. Yet man, while he cannot circumvent cosmic illogic, can wrest limited victories by refusing to be spiritually enslaved by it. This K. does. While he may have been capriciously summoned and rejected by the Castle, K. is not intimidated by his reversals. If K. was not summoned, but merely presented himself as Land-Surveyor in order to storm the Castle's portals by a courageous bit of chicanery, his worthiness as a knight is even more apparent. Regardless of whether his quest was launched by the Castle's summons or by his own need, K. succeeds in making the quest his own. Perhaps the Castle is perpetrating some elaborate hoax which grants K. the illusory self-image of Castle Adversary while it diabolically manipulates him to do the Castle's real, but secret, bidding; even in this least hopeful eventuality, K. remains triumphant in the sense that he is never reduced to the slave mentality. His life is checkered by the brute stupidity of an inept, or malignant, Control Authority; his life is, nevertheless, intense and authentic. "K. fought for something vitally near to him, for himself, and moreover, at least at the very beginning, on his own initiative, for he was the attacker."[6]

Customarily, the success of a Grail knight is contingent upon his asking the needful question. In K.'s case, however,

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[6] Ibid., pp. 74-75.

it may be that success is achieved, not through his framing one specific question, but rather through his conducting himself so that his very existence serves to question the decrees and superstitions which are the villagers' givens and the Castle's means of power. K. asks "for the impossible,"[7] namely a sane explanation of the way things are, and in doing so makes possible his personal transcendence of the Waste Land: a possibility which resides in authentic self-assertion. At another level, K.'s disinclination toward certain questions precisely marks his ability to seize his fate. Notably, K. never misuses his time by addressing futile questions to his eventual fate, questions which would disengage him from the continual struggle: his means of salvation. K. is single-minded and resolute in his contest with an ultimately invincible opponent, but not heedless in the manner of Joseph K. The Castle's hero is capable of discerning, at least in retrospect, certain of his shortcomings and excesses and of preventing such discernment from undermining his basic self-assurance. More important than the questions K. does and does not ask may be his use of the answers his questions do yield him. Presumably, the purpose of non-rhetorical questions is to obtain information; to K.'s great advantage, he does not uncritically ingest the information his questions call forth. By repudiating the villagers' truths K. keeps himself

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[7] Ibid., p. 62.

ignorant in the eyes of both the Castle and the village, but, as he points out, ignorance has much to recommend it:

> ". . . Of course I'm ignorant, that's an unshakable truth and a sad truth for me, but it gives me all the advantage of ignorance, which is greater daring, and so I'm prepared to put up with my ignorance, evil consequences and all, for some time to come, so long as my strength holds out."[8]

K.'s role of knight errant and scapegoat is related to and shaped by his sojourn in the village/Waste Land. Behind the peasants' immoderate attraction to K. lie both their deep dissatisfaction with the life they know and their pathetic belief that K. may be their long-awaited saviour. To those who would cast K. as the village scapegoat, K. represents the terrifying possibility of an unwelcome revelation, the exposure of their tidy lives for the Waste Land that they are. The teacher, the landlady, and others of their viewpoint evidently believe that a Waste Land is not exactly that until someone calls it by its proper name. Like the Emperor's clothes, the Castle's infallibility is a working proposition as long as no one voices his suspicions to the contrary. Ridding the community of the scapegoat would quiet his maddening voice and, through the sacrifice of a ritual murder, perhaps appease the god of the status quo.

Kafka's fondness for the labyrinth as a symbol for life's insolubility is demonstrated yet again in his last novel. As

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[8] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

Frye points out, the monstrous evil which ravages the land may be thought of as the labyrinth itself. Little imagination is required to apply Frye's thought[8a] to The Castle. Labyrinths abound in the chinoiserie configurations into which life in the Castle's village has been arranged, but the prototypical labyrinth is the Castle itself. In fact, the Castle appears to be a labyrinth within a labyrinth, judging from K.'s fruitless attempts to approach the fortress:

> If he forced himself in his present condition to go on at least as far as the Castle entrance, he would have done more than enough.
>
> So he resumed his walk, but the way proved long. For the street he was in, the main street of the village, did not lead up to the Castle hill; it only made toward it and then, as if deliberately, turned aside, and though it did not lead away from the Castle, it led no nearer to it either. At every turn K. expected the road to double back to the Castle, and only because of this expectation did he go on; he was flatly unwilling, tired as he was, to leave the street, and he was also amazed at the length of the village, which seemed to have no end--again and again the same little houses and frost-bound windowpanes and snow and the entire absence of human beings--but at last he tore himself away from the obsession of the street and escaped into a small side-lane, where the snow was still deeper and the exertion of lifting one's feet clear was fatiguing; he broke into a sweat, suddenly came to a stop, and could not go on.[9]

As K. soon finds out, extended conversations with villagers or Castle functionaries are often no more easily negotiated than are the snow-covered streets. The landlady, the mayor, Olga, Burgel, even Frieda, all are capable of speeches of interminable length and serpentine involution. Occasionally, one

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[8a] Frye, p. 190.

[9] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

such conversational snake becomes a tail-swallowing ouroboros, as in the instance of the Mayor's inexplicable explanation of the roles Departments "A" and "B" have played in the matter of the Land-Surveyor,[10] or the landlady's comments on K.'s "last, tiny, vanishing, yes, actually invisible hope."[11] That the villagers echo the volubility and labyrinthine illogic of the Castle is only fitting. As the teacher says, "There is no difference between the peasantry and the Castle."[12] The collective authority of a community is, after all, only an extension of that community. And yet, in some mysterious, not-to-be-mentioned way the Castle has outgrown the people whose welfare it is meant to administer. Olga has learned this truth through her family's suffering:

> "Of course we're all supposed to belong to the Castle, and there's supposed to be no gulf between us, and nothing to be bridged over, and that may be true enough on ordinary occasions, but we've had grim evidence that it's not true when anything really important crops up."[13]

The total power of a collectivized authority is greater than the sum power of the individuals who comprise it; super-personal power seems to have escaped the confines of laws that would describe it and, through a sinister alchemy, to have multiplied its mass. To complicate matters further, equating the Castle with human institutions run amok is disregarding

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[10] Ibid., pp. 81-86.

[11] Ibid., p. 147.

[12] Ibid., p. 14.

a crucial consideration. While K.'s irreconciliable dilemma, the antinomies of individual freedom and communal acceptance, has its origin in society, another aspect of K.'s predicament does not. K., like all men, is limited in his options by forces larger than those of any conceivable human institution. His free will is hedged in by deterministic factors; his life is circumscribed by death; his desire for an acknowledged identity and purpose is offset by the failure of empirical data to prove that any such identity or purpose has ultimate meaning. The case may be, not that the Castle has outgrown man's ability to control it, but that it was never susceptible of control. Man's experience vis à vis the universe is, then, the true labyrinth.

The labyrinth dominates the Waste Land and seems to cast its distorting shadow over everything. Not only K.'s identity is in question, all identities in this Waste Land are tenuous and mutable. People, objects, events, and words are never univalent; every meaning has its equal and opposite meaning somehow contained within it. Ambivalent reality seems to be the actual state of affairs, rather than merely a figment of K.'s imagination, and yet only K. is perplexed or discomfited by the irreconcilable dualities of life in the Waste Land. The Castle itself is probably the greatest source of mystery. Seen from below, the Castle appears to soar "light and free into the air,"[14] but a closer view reveals the "so-called

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[14] Ibid., p. 11.

Castle"[15] to be "only a wretched-looking town."[16] The Castle's message for K. is as paradoxical as its appearance is deceptive:

> The Castle above them, which K. had hoped to reach that very day, was already beginning to grow dark and retreated again into the distance. But as if to give him a parting sign till their next encounter, a bell began to ring merrily up there, a bell that for at least a second made his heart palpitate, for its tone was menacing, too, as if it threatened him with the fulfillment of his vague desire. This great bell soon died away, however, and its place was taken by a feeble, monotonous little tinkle, which might have come from the Castle, but might have been somewhere in the village.[17]

The assistants are another example of the arbitrariness and lack of fixity which characterize identity in K.'s new world. K. does not recognize Arthur and Jeremiah, and yet he is willing, at least at first, to accept them as his old assistants. Although other people "usually manage to distinguish"[18] the twins, K. finds them "as like as two snakes"[19] and determines to treat them as a unit. In a baffling telephone conversation with the Castle, K. announces himself as Joseph, the Land-Surveyor's assistant:

> "But the assistants are called--" there was a short pause, evidently to inquire the names from somebody else-- "Arthur and Jeremiah." "These are the new assistants," said K. "No, they are the old ones." "They are the new ones; I am the old assistant. I came today after the Land-Surveyor." "No," was shouted back. "Then who am I?" asked K. as blandly as before.
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> And after a pause the same voice with the same defect answered him, yet with a deeper and more authoratative tone: "You are the old assistant."[20]

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[15] Ibid., p. 12

[16] Ibid., pp. 11-12

[17] Ibid., p. 21

[18] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[19] Ibid., p. 24.

[20] Ibid., p. 28.

K. can never determine which of Barnabas's appearances is real, yet tends, despite the messenger's lack of success, to be comforted by and drawn to Barnabas's aura of majesty. Olga first describes Sortini's letter to Amalia as being "couched in the vilest language,"[21] dishonorable, and infuriating. She later extenuates Sortini's insulting action by urging his lack of social graces:

> ". . . all that should make Sortini's methods more comprehensible to you, and less monstrous; compared with Klamm's they're comparatively reasonable; and even for those intimately affected by them much more endurable."[22]

Frieda and Klamm also elude definitive description. Frieda is an "unobtrusive little girl with fair hair, sad eyes, and hollow cheeks, but with a striking look of conscious superiority."[23] "Her hands were certainly small and delicate, but they could quite as well have been called weak and characterless."[24] Frieda's beauty, questionable as it is, soon deserts her after a few days without Klamm and with K. Her chief attraction seems to be her relationship to Klamm, yet even that relationship is questioned by Pepi and others. But how can anything concerning Klamm be settled decisively when a question as basic as "Who is Klamm?" cannot be? Barnabas

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[21] Ibid., p. 250.

[22] Ibid., p. 255.

[23] Ibid., p. 47.

[24] Ibid., p. 49.

himself doubts "that the official who is referred to as Klamm is really Klamm."[25] As Olga explains Klamm's protean qualities:

> ". . . his appearance is well known in the village, some people have seen him, everybody has heard of him, and out of glimpses and rumors and through various distorting factors an image of Klamm has been constructed which is certainly true in fundamentals. But only in fundamentals. In detail it fluctuates, and yet perhaps not so much as Klamm's real appearance. For he's reported as having one appearance when he comes into the village and another on leaving it, after having his beer he looks different from what he does before it, when he's awake he's different from when he's asleep, when he's alone he's different from when he's talking to people, and--what is comprehensible after all that--he's almost another person up in the Castle."[26]

K. is in the Waste Land, but does not become part of it. While he cannot escape the nebulous atmosphere which pervades the countryside, he can refuse to lose himself in its distortions. That the Count's domain is marked by sterility and death-proneness[27] is made clear by the ubiquitous and symbolic snow and cold. But why has this place fallen under the spell of the labyrinth/monster? The villagers, and even the Castle authorities, have surrendered to death in that they have forfeited their individuality through mindless allegiance to superpersonal authority. Only Amalia has had the courage to assert her own ego against the all-consuming demands of the

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[25] Ibid., p. 229.

[26] Ibid., p. 230-31.

[27] Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka: A Critical Study of His Writings, trans. by Sheema Zeben Buehne (New York: Ungar, 1968), p. 431.

Castle, and her having done so is regarded as infamous and despicable, rather than heroic. Secondly, the barrenness of the village may actually be an a priori condition following from the fact that all life is, in a sense, death-prone.

So the questing knight searches ambiguities for answers and pursues freedom and life in the midst of slavery and death. The knight errant is on a collision course with the labyrinth and must remain ever-watchful lest he be metamorphosed into the closely allied identity of scapegoat. One of the chief difficulties of K.'s task is that he appears, at least temporarily, to have become polarized in regard to his two opposing goals of freedom and acceptance. Because the Castle's noncompliance with K.'s wishes has made the latter goal appear more problematic than the former, K. woos the Castle, often (unwittingly) at the cost of his freedom. Hoping to better his position with the Castle or to uncover useful information, K. pursues relationships with the villagers: "He felt irresistably drawn to seek out new acquaintances, but each new acquaintance only seemed to increase his weariness."[28] K. is dependent on the good will of others, not only for help and intercession in his search for the Castle, but also for the basic necessities of life. Without others to aid and sustain him, K. is lost, yet this aid and sustenance actually ennervate him. K. becomes aware of this paradox during his first visit to Barnabas's family:

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[28] Kafka, Castle, p. 14.

> The other people in the village, who turned him away or were afraid of him, seemed much less dangerous, for all that they did was to throw him back on his own resources, helping him to concentrate his powers, but such ostensible helpers as these, who on the strength of a petty masquerade brought him into their homes instead of into the Castle, deflected him from his goal, whether intentionally or not, and only helped to destroy him.[29]

When Frieda leaves the Herrenhof with K. and his two assistants, K. has the inappropriately unromantic thought that "if he had been alone he would have got on still better."[30] Although K. often feels that he is most effective when most alone, he more often reasons that others, particularly Frieda, are of invaluable help to him. His regard for the assistance of Frieda and others is perhaps heightened by his disillusioning experience with total individual freedom:

> . . . it seemed to K. as if at last those people had broken off all relations with him, and as if now in reality he were freer than he had ever been, and at liberty to wait here in this place, usually forbidden to him, as long as he desired, and had won a freedom such as hardly anybody else had ever succeeded in winning, and as if nobody could dare to touch him or drive him away, or even speak to him; but--this conviction was at least equally strong--as if at the same time there was nothing more senseless, nothing more hopeless, than this freedom, this waiting, this inviolability.[31]

Although he does not yet realize it, achievement of either one of his contrary goals would mean failure, rather than success, for K. Only through transcending the antinomics of freedom

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[29] Ibid., p. 41-42.

[30] Ibid., p. 36.

[31] Ibid., p. 139.

and obligation can he obtain his rightful, or as yet unapprehended, goal.

The mutually exclusive nature of K.'s objectives, liberation and investiture, makes his quest a fitting metaphor for man's existential situation. K. is, after all, an inhabitant of the realm of Count Westwest, a being whose name recalls Amerika's Hotel Occidental and associates the Castle with the West--specifically, as Greenberg points out in a footnote to The Terror of Art, "the West at a point where the West has reached its west, its evening,"[32] and with death. This land into which K. travels is the modern world,a decadent world whose inhabitants are under a death sentence. K.'s reminiscences of a far away, by contrast idyllic, home are not meant to imply that K. can return to his former existence through physical flight from the Castle. (K. makes it very clear that such flight is unthinkable.[33]) K.'s prior life symbolizes, not a physical sphere lying outside the Castle, but the complacency of unexamined consciousness. K. cannot go home because he has awakened to his existential situation and thereby bid farewell forever to his earlier lack of reflection. His apprehension of the dilemma which is life is objectified by his entrance into the alien microcosm, the village. K.'s defining himself as Land-Surveyor is related to his having

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[32] Martin Greenberg, The Terror of Art: Kafka and Modern Literature (London: Deutsch, 1968), pp. 162-63.

[33] Kafka, Castle, p. 180.

glimpsed the chaos behind the orderly facade of his once-complacent world; land-surveying is also significant for K.'s roles as knight errant and scapegoat. Martin Greenberg notes that

> In the universal dream landscape of The Castle land means life, the spiritual terrain of human life. One who comes to survey land in such a universal world is a life-surveyor, a thinker who tries to grasp the whole of life in the survey of his consciousness. Land-surveyor K. is a knowledge-seeker. . . .[34]

K. has emerged into awareness that life is not as it had seemed, yet he does not know what or how life is. In pursuit of answers, he accosts the Castle and the sacrosanct beliefs of the villagers. Thus, through pursuing his quest for knowledge, he risks calling forth the hostility and fear which the community affix to a scapegoat. As Wilhelm Emrich points out, land-surveying is a revolutionary act,[35] and is therefore unalterably opposed by the villagers. The Mayor notifies K.:

> ". . . really I must tell you the plain unvarnished truth of the matter. You've been taken on as Land-Surveyor, as you say, but unfortunately, we have no need of a land-surveyor. There wouldn't be the least use for one here. The frontiers of our little state are marked out and all officially recorded. So what should we do with a land-surveyor?"[36]

The Castle and its sheep-brained constituents regard as heresy K.'s attempts to probe what seems, or is said to be, for what is.

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[34] Greenberg, Terror, p. 164.

[35] Emrich, Kafka, p. 368.

[36] Kafka, Castle, pp. 76-77.

Certainly, no quest-romance would be complete without the presence of women to both tempt and ennoble the knight-hero, and Kafka has graciously complied with the convention, often by making one woman serve both functions simultaneously. Women also serve to effect and to comment on K.'s role as pharmakos. K. wants something, whether it be information, assistance, or sexual gratification, from all the women he deals with, yet these women also want something of K. They seem determined to include him in their own personal drama through casting him in the role of rescuing hero or scapegoat, or sometimes both by turns. Women pose a special problem for K. because they seduce him away from his goal of individual freedom while appearing to promise increased success in his pursuit of the Castle. It is never clear, yet one suspects, that women may be the, conscious or unwitting, tools of the Castle's machinations against K. The women of The Castle epitomize the indefinable, contradictory qualities of identity within the Waste Land. While the landlady appears to be a rather clear-cut sinister Mother figure, and Olga to be a sympathetic ally, the other female members of the village are less easily placed in terms of their relationship to K. Several female characters bear directly on K.'s fate, but one of these, Frieda, is singular in both her ability to influence him and her significance for his two archetypal roles.

Frieda is inextricably linked, in K.'s own mind, to the success or failure of his quest. K.'s belief that a correlation

exists between his success as a knight and his success as Frieda's suitor has some basis in quest-romance. According to Frye:

> The central form of quest-romance is the dragon-killing theme exemplified in the stories of St. George and Perseus. . . . A land ruled by a helpless old king is laid waste by a seamonster, to whom one young person after another is offered to be devoured, until the lot falls on the king's daughter: at that point the hero arrives, kills the dragon, marries the daughter, and succeeds to the kingdom. . . . The ritual analogies of the myth suggest that the monster is the sterility of the land itself, and that the sterility of the land is present in the age and impotence of the king. . . .[37]

K. is obviously bent on dragon-killing, as is indicated by his attempt to overcome the labyrinth of bureaucracy and illogic which separates him from his goal. While Frieda is not the king's daughter, she is the closest thing to royalty which the village has to offer. She has enjoyed a privileged relationship with Klamm, the being who becomes, in K.'s eyes, the personification of Castle authority. Despite Klamm's almost majestic powers, likening him to a Fisher King may initially appear startling. Klamm engages, on a fairly regular basis, in sexual liaisons with village women and is greatly revered, not only by his present and former mistresses, but by all his "subjects." His sexual activity and honored reputation appear to refute an interpretation of Klamm as a sterile Fisher King. However, Klamm is also the personification of the Castle and the Castle's system, and the Castle is, after all, one form of the labyrinth. Seen in this light, Klamm becomes synonymous

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[37] Frye, Anatomy, p. 189.

with sterility and death. Most importantly, as has been discussed earlier, Klamm is too elusive and complex a figure to be reduced to one half of any equation. "Klamm equals a symbol of decadent authority" is a drastic over-simplification. And yet, one aspect of Klamm's meaning is his ability to suggest a kind of mythopoeic, entrenched authority, the old order.

So, K. arrives in the village, prepares to give battle to the labyrinth-dragon, and hopes to win the hand of the King's consort in order to win a place in the kingdom. However, his original plan of action does not take into account the highly ambiguous nature of his intended lady. K.'s vacillating, uncertain relationship with Frieda parallels his experience with the Castle. Whether pursuing a romantic relationship or the road to the Castle, the questing knight must conduct himself as if he were deciding between clear choices. In actuality, there is no such thing as a clear choice in a world where all courses of action and all personal relationships are open to contradictory interpretations. Frieda's name means "peace,"[38] but whether or not peace is what she means in K.'s life is never certain. On the one hand, Frieda seems to symbolize an orderly, conventional life which might succeed in transforming the village scapegoat into a member-in-good-standing of the community. On the other hand, K.'s cohabitation

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[38] Greenberg, Terror, p. 180.

with Frieda coincides with his becoming obsessed with pushing his quest for the Castle even more strongly than before. His search for recognition by the Castle involves a paradox which escapes the hero's awareness; similarly, his quest for domestic happiness with Frieda contains an irreconcilable opposition of contradictories. His desire to possess Frieda drives K. to accost the Castle relentlessly; his doing so drives him ever farther away from his ostensible goal of union with Frieda. At the same time, his proposed union with Frieda deflects his energies away from his assault on the Castle.

> The conversation with Hans had raised new hopes in him, improbable, he admitted, completely groundless even, but all the same not to be put out of his mind. . . . If he gave himself up to them--and there was no choice--then he must husband all his strength, trouble about nothing else--food, shelter, the village authorities, no, not even about Frieda--and in reality the whole thing turned only on Frieda, for everything else gave him anxiety only in relation to her. For this reason he must try to keep this post, which gave Frieda a certain degree of security, and he must not complain if for this end he was made to endure more at the teacher's hands than he would have had to endure in the ordinary course. All that sort of thing could be put up with, it belonged to the ordinary continual petty annoyances of life, it was nothing compared with what K. was striving for, and he had not come here simply to lead an honored and comfortable life.[39]

That K. has not penetrated the paradoxical nature of his quest and his relationship to Frieda is revealed by his illogical statement that he must both forsake physical comfort and, for Frieda's sake, insure it. Martin Greenberg points out K.'s

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[39] Kafka, Castle, pp. 199-200.

refusal to see the incompatibility of his objectives:

> For the sake of his "end" he must not care about food, lodgings, the village authorities who have given him the school janitor's job, or even about Frieda; for the sake of Frieda he must care about his job, which provides them food and lodgings, and therefore too about the village authorities, who provide the job. For the sake of a life of "peace" ("Frieda") he must endure the petty afflictions of the world, which are nothing compared with his goal, which is not a life of peace ("Frieden")![40]

Like the knights of old whose pursuit of the life-giving Grail led them into hazard and hardship, K. must forswear creature comforts and security if he would keep his own life free of the Castle's thralldom.

The results of pursuing Frieda make obtaining her impossible; this is the central irony of K.'s courtship of Klamm's former mistress. But there are other ironies. In fact, the common denominator uniting all aspects of K.'s dealings with Frieda is irony, irony based on the mutual validity of two totally incongrouous possibilities. Because of her prior intimacy with Klamm, K. views Frieda as a valuable link between himself and the Castle, yet he fears that his appropriation of the barmaid may have seriously affronted the authority who monitors his destiny. From the outset, his attitude toward Frieda is characterized by indecision and ambivalence; as early as their rapturous embrace in the beer puddles outside Klamm's door, K. is of two minds where Frieda is concerned:

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[40] Greenberg, Terror, p. 184.

> So it came to him not as a shock but as a faint glimmer of comfort when from Klamm's room a deep, authoritative, impersonal voice called for Frieda. "Frieda," whispered K. in Frieda's ear, passing on the summons. With a mechanical instinct of obedience Frieda made as if to spring to her feet, then she remembered where she was, stretched herself, laughing quietly, and said: "I'm not going, I'm never going to him again." K. wanted to object, to urge her to go to Klamm, and began to fasten her disordered blouse, but he could not bring himself to speak, he was too happy to have Frieda in his arms, too troubled also in his happiness, for it seemed to him that in letting Frieda go he would lose all he had. And as if his support had strengthened her, Frieda clenched her fist and beat on the door, crying: "I'm with the Land-Surveyor!" That silenced Klamm at any rate, but K. started up, and on his knees beside Frieda gazed round him in the uncertain light of dawn. What had happened. Where were his hopes? What could he expect from Frieda now that she had betrayed everything? [41]

K.'s inability to maintain a consistent attitude toward Frieda is understood by the reader who finds himself wavering in his estimation and interpretation of her. As Frye says, in romance "Characters tend to be either for or against the quest. If they assist it they are idealized as simply gallant or pure, if they obstruct it they are caricatured as simply villainous or cowardly."[42] Kafka's modern quest-romances eschew the simple, hard outlines of black and white characterizations, finding them ill-suited to the uncertain world in which these knight-victims reside. K. believes that, in Frieda, he has found one certainty, one fixed point which will provide him with a sure direction. He explicitly states this belief when

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[41] Kafka, Castle, pp. 54-55.

[42] Frye, Anatomy, p. 195.

he tells her, "Before I knew you I was going about in a blind circle."[43] But what is the certainty Frieda provides him? Frieda repeats to K. the landlady's analysis of his dealings with Frieda: ". . . you believe you have secured in me a sweetheart of Klamm's, and so possess a hostage that can be ransomed at a great price."[44] And K. himself seems to corroborate the landlady's theory when he tells Olga that his "game" with the Castle has become favorably complicated by his relation to Frieda:

> ". . . I have, so to speak, a larger circumference--which means something, it may not be much--yet I have already a home, a position, and real work to do, I have a fiancée who takes her share of my professional duties when I have other business, I'm going to marry her and become a member of the community, and besides my official connection I have also a personal connection with Klamm, though as yet I haven't been able to make use of it. That's surely quite a lot?" [45]

While his motivation may not be as cynical as the landlady would paint it, K. does attach certain hopes to Frieda's "personal connection" to Klamm, and these hopes have played an incalculable part in K.'s romance with Frieda. Yet Frieda's influence with Klamm, if it ever existed outside K.'s own mind, cannot be used to further K.'s quest. Even Frieda's love for K. is as open to doubt as is her value as an ally. She tell K., "I can't think of any greater happiness than to be with you all the time, without interruption, endlessly,"[46] yet she leaves him for the assistant Jeremiah. K. asserts that

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[43] Kafka, Castle, p. 179.

[44] Ibid., p. 203.

[45] Ibid., p. 258.

he owes any "prospects" he has to Frieda, "to Frieda, who is so modest that if you were to ask her about it, she wouldn't know it existed."[47] In contrast, Pepi believes K. has been used and "misused"[48] by Frieda and has become little more than "Frieda's third assistant."[49]

Clearly, K. is deluded in his almost superstitious belief that Frieda can ease his access to the Castle and his entrance into the community, thus bringing success to his quest and an end to his role as scapegoat. Frieda herself attempts to use K. as the scapegoat who must bear the responsibility for the consequences attaching to her leaving the Herrenhof,[50] an action she committed on her own initiative. While K. does not become a self-styled scapegoat in the manner of Joseph K., he does hold himself accountable for severing Frieda from her happiness with Klamm: "I know, oh, I know that I'll never be able to make up to Frieda for all she has lost for my sake, her position in the Herrenhof and her friendship with Klamm."[51] But he also envisions himself as Frieda's knight-champion; not only for himself does he labor to force the Castle to verify his worth and purpose. At one point he tries to conciliate Frieda by pointing out to her that he must go to the Barnabas family "for the sake of the futures of us both, as you know,"[52]

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[47] Ibid., pp. 258-59.

[48] Ibid., p. 399.

[49] Ibid., p. 397.

[50] Ibid., p. 206.

[51] Ibid., p. 61.

[52] Ibid., p. 320.

and he counters the landlady's castigation of him by telling Frieda that "in acting for myself I was acting for you too."[53] By extension, K.'s quest is meant to benefit, not only himself and Frieda, but unlimited others as well. Like the Grail knights, "his mission is a universal one."[54] Pepi, too, conceives of K. as a conquering hero out of chivalric romance, "a rescuer of maidens in distress."[55] But even the shallow Pepi sees K. as enacting a double role in her drama. According to her, the supposed rescuer becomes the self-sacrificing pawn in Frieda's wily schemes and, in doing so, brings calamity on Pepi as well. "What a misfortune and how frivolously brought about, above all by K.!"[56] K. believes (as Pepi does, as perhaps even Frieda does on occasion) that his role in regard to the women he encounters is that of the knight who seeks the potent and mysterious patronage of women for whom he, in turn, will face dangers and perform miracles. The hidden danger is that, in failing to satisfy the ladies' expectations, he will become the scapegoat they only too readily sacrifice to vindicate their fantasies.

Although K. (temporarily unmindful that freedom is as much his goal as is the Castle) believes that his quest cannot succeed without Frieda, he is deluded about her actual effect

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[53] Ibid., p. 207.

[54] Greenberg, Terror, p. 190.

[55] Kafka, Castle, p. 377.

[56] Ibid., p. 390.

on his quest. Janouch records a conversation in which Kafka told him, "Women are snares, which lie in wait for men on all sides in order to drag them into the merely finite."[57] Kafka's words illuminate Frieda's true function in The Castle. K. is drawn to Frieda because he believes her to be an initiate in the mysteries of the Castle, a sphere which K. aspires to penetrate and, through discovering its secret, to make his own. K.'s relationship to Frieda cannot benefit his quest, however, since K. begins to think of himself as dependent on Frieda, as his many references to the debt he owes Frieda indicate. His dependence bespeaks his forfeiture of personal freedom; through reliance on Frieda's "connections," K. has been seduced into the "merely finite." As an independent, solitary man K. has been able, while never discerning their mutual exclusivity, to keep both his goals, personal freedom and communal kinship, in sight. But once he determines to marry Frieda the importance of staking out a respected position in the village obsesses him and totally eclipses his concern with freedom. Because of Frieda, K. tirelessly pursues the Castle, and, ironically, because K. tirelessly pursues the Castle, Frieda leaves him. The paradoxical nature of K.'s affair with Frieda suggests that the knight who would succeed in his quest must undertake it alone. Love is one of the comforts

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[57] Gustav Janouch, Conversations with Kafka, trans. by Geronury Rees (New York: Laughlin, 1971), p. 178.

the knight errant must, ultimately, renounce. Further proof of the impossibility of K.'s love, if it is love, for Frieda comes in her wistful remark that "If we had only gone away somewhere at once that night, we might be in peace now, always together, your hand always near enough for mine to grasp."[58] Frieda's wish that they might flee the village is actually a longing to sidestep the issues which K., the Land-Surveyor, has chosen to confront. Frieda seems to blame the Waste Land itself for the failure of their love:

> ". . . in this world there's no undisturbed place for our love, neither in the village nor anywhere else; and I dream of a grave, deep and narrow, where we could clasp each other in our arms as with clamps, and I would hide your face in me, and nobody would ever see us any more."[59]

Yet, if Frieda's words are taken literally, she must be seen as allied to the Waste Land. Her love is death-oriented, as is the unreal anti-life of the Waste Land, while K.'s passionate commitment is to life: all of life, life at its fullest. If her pronouncement is considered symbolic, then Frieda opposes K.'s goal of self-assertion with her own goal, the mutual surrender of their individual personalities and consciousness in a static embrace which would mean but another kind of death, a life-in-death for K.

Ultimately, Frieda sets K. "free."[60] With his characteristic resiliency and essential optimism, K. refuses to despair over his losing Frieda; indeed, he at first refuses to

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[58] Kafka, Castle, p. 328. [59] Ibid., p. 182.

[60] Ibid., p. 330.

concede that what he has lost may not be regained. "Frieda had left him. It could not be final, it was not so bad as that, Frieda could be won back. . . ."[61] But K. is not insensitive. On the contrary, Frieda's defection heightens K.'s understanding. When he encounters Frieda at the Herrenhof, rather than upbraid her, he sympathizes with her. While he still fails to grasp the paradox which precludes his happiness with Frieda, he does understand his part in her leaving. As he says of his being supplanted by the assistants and their irrepressible high spirits and low comedy:

> ". . .all that of course must have seemed very nice, especially when I was the antithesis of it all, and was always running after affairs, moreover, which were scarcely comprehensible, which were exasperating to you, and which threw me together with people whom you considered deserving of your hate. . . ."[62]

Later, after his pivotal experience in the upper chambers of the Herrenhof, K. is able to see that the vicious relationship between his longing for the Castle and his desire for Frieda renders him incapable of making her happy:

> "I should be happy if she was to come back to me, but I should at once begin to neglect her all over again. This is how it is."[63]

Through the unlikely agency of Pepi's endless, self-justifying complaint, K. is even able to extract a crucial lesson about himself from his experience with Frieda:

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[61] Ibid., p. 304.

[62] Ibid., pp. 326-27.

[63] Ibid., p. 401.

> "I don't know whether it is like this, and my own guilt is by no means clear to me; only, when I compare myself with you something of this kind dawns on me: it is as if we had both striven too intensely, too noisily, too childishly, with too little experience, to get something that for instance with Frieda's calm and Frieda's matter-of-factness can be got easily and without much ado. We have tried to get it by crying, by scratching, by tugging--just as a child tugs at the tablecloth, gaining nothing, but only bringing all the splendid things down on the floor and putting them out of its reach forever. I don't know whether it is like that, but what I am sure of is that it is more likely to be so than the way you describe it as being."[64]

Is K. recanting? Does he abandon both his quest for personal freedom and his quest for admission into society? Subsequent action in the novel answers these questions with a negative. K. has finally valued Frieda as a woman, rather than as a means to an end. Furthermore, he has learned the lesson of patience.[65] As Kafka once wrote:

> There are two cardinal sins from which all others spring: impatience and laziness. Because of impatience they were driven out of paradise, because of laziness they don't return. Perhaps, however, there is only one cardinal sin: impatience. Because of impatience they were driven out, because of impatience they don't return.[66]

Impatience has been the keynote of K.'s dealing with the Castle. Ronald Gray suggests that Pepi functions as a kind of looking-glass for K. Her name

> is the usual abbreviation or nickname for girls called Josephine, and Joseph is not only the name of K.'s

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[64] Ibid., pp. 404-405.

[65] Greenberg, Terror, p. 191.

[66] Franz Kafka, Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings, trans. by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), p. 34.

> counterpart in The Trial, it is also the name given by K. in The Castle on one occasion. . . . Here [in Pepi] all K.'s determination to get on, to reach the highest point, and enter the Castle, is parodied . . . in the figure of this childish young woman. . . .[67]

The lesson of patience comes with K.'s awareness of "the ineptitude of his approach to the Castle."[68] He has made objects of people and has limited his own identity, and his very humanity, by defining himself only in terms of his Castle objective. He has allowed himself to become enslaved by the notion that he can obtain a material victory through directing a temper tantrum at the world. Finally, K. comes to see that real strength, and the path to successful completion of his quest, lie in the self-containment that saves one from the dangerous folly of seeking to replace the world with one's own ego, for that is what K.'s monomania has amounted to. Paradoxically, in trying to vanquish the Castle, K. has lost his freedom; fortunately the loss is not irremediable. Though he never says so explicitly, K. has apparently come to understand that he has misconceived his quest and that winning a humbling concession from the powers that be is not his proper goal--perhaps not even a possible goal. His inward condition, not ceaseless activity, is what will determine his ultimate success or failure. That K. is moving toward an acceptance

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[67] Ronald Gray, Franz Kafka (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1973), p. 169.

[68] Ibid., p. 171.

of this principle is revealed by the change he undergoes with Frieda's departure:

> "While she was with me I was continually out on those wanderings that you make such a mock of; now that she is gone I am almost unemployed, am tired, have a yearning for a state of even more complete unemployment."[69]

K. achieves a measure of anagnorisis with the spiritual growth resulting from what he learns about himself from Pepi and Frieda, and what he learns about the Castle from Burgel.

It has been suggested before that Kafka chooses to symbolize man's existential predicament with a labyrinth because this symbol incorporates, not only life's resistance to man's attempts at knowledge and mastery, but also the implicit possibility of man's victory. In The Castle Kafka does what he fails or refuses to do in either of the earlier novels; he provides explicit information of the means to this victory. The information is deliberately mystifying and complicated, but it nevertheless expresses the "invisible hope" which Kafka vouchsafes to mankind. The purpose of both K.'s interview with Burgel and his subsequent half-conscious vigil in the Herrenhof's upper corridor is to illustrate the saving grace by which the doomed scapegoat may be transformed into the triumphant knight errant. It is significant that the nature of this saving grace is revealed to K. through an accident.

K., in a state of extreme exhaustion, searches the hallway of the Herrenhof for Erlanger's room, to which he has been

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[69] Kafka, Castle, p. 401.

summoned for an official interview. His fatigue has made him nearly oblivious to the consequences of his actions, and, thus emboldened, he tries a door which may or may not be Erlanger's. Unintentionally, and all-but-unaware, K. has stumbled into the very door which could admit him to the thing he seeks: the reconciliation of his free, individual self with the world order. Of utmost importance is the fact that K. and Burgel are involved in a nocturnal conversation[70] rather than an official, according-to-protocol interview. Also important is Burgel's being "a liason secretary"[71] between those who deal directly with the applicants (the village secretaries) and those who determine their fate (the Castle secretaries). This means that Burgel mediates between the personal plea of an individual and the impersonal, universal decrees to which such pleas are addressed.[72] In a manner unheard of in official functionaires, Burgel sympathizes with K.'s lack of employment, offers to intervene in the case, and gives K. encouraging advice. But K., overwhelmed by his desire for sleep, scarcely attends to Burgel. Despite K.'s unresponsiveness, Burgel, "with the loquacity of those who are happy,"[73] launches a monologue which would tell K., if he were capable of listening, that an unprecedented chance of success is within his grasp.

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[70] Ibid., p. 335.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Emrich, Kafka, p. 464.

[73] Kafka, Castle, p. 349.

Through "coming unannounced in the middle of the night"[74] to a competent secretary who is nevertheless not the secretary assigned to his case, the applicant places the official organization in his own power. Burgel exactly describes K.'s situation when he discusses this hypothetical applicant's lack of comprehension:

> ". . . he himself will scarcely notice anything of his own accord. He has, after all, in his own opinion probably only for some indifferent, accidental reasons--being overtired, disappointed, ruthless and indifferent from overfatigue and disappointment--pushed his way into a room other than the one he wanted to enter, he sits there in ignorance, occupied with his thoughts, if he is occupied at all, with his mistake, or with his fatigue. . . ."[75]

Burgel's illuminating discourse is in vain. K. is asleep. Burgel has revealed the saving grace through which K. might have brought both of his two opposing goals into reach; however, the existence of this "saving grace" is counterbalanced by the applicant's inability to make use of it. Final success will only be attainable to the seeker who is able to maintain the precarious balance between waking and sleeping which is so crucial for Kafka. The nocturnal conversation symbolizes the knight's presenting himself in his unadulterated, singular selfhood, his having slipped through the depersonalizing, regimented modes of thought and being which the "official organization" controls:

> Only at night do the individual "futile demands," all the secret troubles and worries [of the applicant] burst forth elementally and imperatively from man's inner being. In Kafka night is the sphere in which the human

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[74] Ibid., p. 343.

[75] Ibid., p. 349.

> being is directly confronted with the totality of his existence and must take his stand in relation to that totality.[76]

It is necessary that the quester transcend the artificially limited and defined view of life and self which daylight rationality upholds. If, through unheard of endurance and audacity, the knight can walk the edge between a slavish consciousness of the objective world and a total absence of consciousness, he can achieve a liberating breakthrough which "is at the same time abandonment of the limited sphere of being in which man and world exist."[77] His coming to the "wrong" secretary, that is the unofficial official, is indicative of his having escaped the "constrained, confined and determined"[78] categories in which his reason has imprisoned him.

The Kafkan catch is that this borderland between matter-of-fact wakefulness and dreaming appears to be uninhabitable. Man flees from it into the reassuring and familiar realms of waking consciousness or sleep. K.'s refuge is a dreaming sleep in which he envisions his signal, and nearly effortless, victory over a Castle official. His dream illustrates the meaninglessness of a victory which only exists in solipsistic fantasy. One must retain sufficient consciousness to enable him to put forward his plea: to keep clearly in view "what

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[76] Emrich, Kafka, p. 466. [77] Ibid., p. 473.

[78] Greenberg, Terror, p. 206.

the central issue for him as a person, as a 'self,' really is, what the 'futile demands' are that he wants to and must make in order to realize himself as a person."[79] K. cannot avail himself of the opportunity to succeed in his quest because he cannot maintain the magical level of consciousness. As Burgel says, "One's physical energies last only to a certain limit. Who can help the fact that precisely this limit is significant in other ways too?"[80] With his typical refusal to pronounce a final, unequivocal judgment of man's hope or lack of it, Kafka provides Burgel the following as his final advice to K.:

> "Go along now. Who knows what awaits you over there? Everything here is full of opportunities, after all. Only there are, of course, opportunities that are, in a manner of speaking, too great to be made use of, there are things that are wrecked on nothing but themselves."[81]

K.'s failure to seize victory in Burgel's room does not spell final defeat, however. Without having consciously absorbed Burgel's revelation, K. nevertheless achieves an important victory through the very means outlined by Burgel. After the interviews with Burgel and Erlanger, K. finds himself dazedly wandering the hallway in the Herrenhof where the "gentlemen" are quartered for the night. Without realizing it, K. is in exactly the prescribed state of mind and being to overpower the efficient machinery of the Castle. His mere presence in the hallway causes an almost total breakdown of

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[79] Emrich, Kafka, p. 474.

[80] Kafka, Castle, p. 351.

[81] Ibid.

the systematic routine and forces the Castle officials to alter or suspend their habitual methods of discharging business. K.'s utter exhaustion leads him to an act which, if he were his normal self and thus aware of its enormity, he might never have undertaken, even if it had occurred to him to do so. But, in a state of consciousness which foregoes rational analysis, K. gains entrance to a forbidden sphere, observing a heretofore secret aspect of the Castle's business. He watches the ceaseless and incomprehensible activity involved in the distribution of files, and his reaction to what he sees is critically important.

> K. considered all this not only with curiosity but also with sympathy. He almost enjoyed the feeling of being in the midst of this bustle, looked this way and that, following--even though at an appropriate distance--the servants, who, admittedly, had already more than once turned toward him with a severe glance, with lowered head and pursed lips, while he watched their work of distribution.[82]

Although he does not realize it, K. is actually (as his ability to sympathize with them reveals) in a position superior to the Castle functionaries, who are too ashamed to face him. K. sees the monumental task which the Castle performs for mankind, the establishment of order out of chaos, and gains respect for the agency through which this task is made possible. He understands and appreciates the system which he formerly ridiculed and condemned. "But at the same time he does not

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[82] Ibid., p. 357.

stop regarding . . . [the Castle and its representatives] as antagonists; he still does not feel at home in their midst, only 'almost' at home. He will never cease from Mental Flight, he will never cease to be the land-surveyor K."[83]

K.'s conception of his relationship to the Castle has changed in that, now, he no longer desires a revolutionary personal victory which would bring the Castle crashing down about his ears. His personal relationship to the Castle has changed, and possibly his "official" relationship changes as well. While watching the distribution of the files, K. observes what strikes him as an irregularity, the destruction of an official document. It was the last remaining file, "actually only a little piece of paper, a leaf from a note-pad. . . . 'That might very well be my file,' it flashed through K.'s mind."[84] K. is never able to discern whether or not the destroyed file is his, and the reader, as well, is left in doubt. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is plausible to suppose that K.'s penetration of the gentlemen's corridor/sanctum has so powerfully challenged the official organization that it will never again presume to reduce K. to protocol on a note-pad. Even if K. is mistaken in his conjecture that the file is his, the detachment with which he contemplates this possibility is noteworthy. "He seems to face himself and the bureaucracy with greater inner

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[83] Greenberg, Terror, p. 213.

[84] Kafka, Castle, p. 362.

calmness as a result of the deeper insight he has gained into the organization of the authorities."[85] K.'s subsequently apologizing to the landlord and lady of the Herrenhof for the trouble he has unwittingly caused them, and especially the gentlemen, further attests to his new measure of reconciliation to the Castle, reconciliation he has achieved without cost to his personal freedom. When informed of the terrible disrupture which his being in the gentlemen's way has resulted in, K. affirms that "he had certainly not wanted to upset anyone."[86] As Greenberg maintains, K. does not want a victory which would destroy the Castle. "He does not want to destroy the world, but to redeem it."[87] What is true of the Grail knight is also true of K.: that his quest is redemptive, not destructive, even if the Grail is not found or the riddle of the castle is not solved.

K. has learned much which will benefit him in his quest. Through transcending the limited and limiting categories to which rational consciousness subjects understanding of life and self, K. has confronted the collective, superpersonal authorities of life with his unmediated, total selfhood. By doing so, he has escaped his obsessive and deluded belief that his goal is conquest of the Castle. Emrich, in discussing

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[85] Emrich, Kafka, p. 489.

[86] Kafka, Castle, p. 371.

[87] Greenberg, Terror, p. 212.

the "'solutions' at which the novel is aiming,"[88] "Surmounting the Tragic Antinomies,"[89] says of K.'s finally bringing his two goals into alignment:

> It is a matter of the bridge between waking, daytime consciousness and nocturnal, hidden, unconscious knowledge. Only the union of both could bring about the union of free existence and bondage.[90]

K. has won a limited but important victory over the Castle, and his having done so indicates that he will escape the loss of freedom and identity which surrender to, or total identification with, the Castle would mean. He has gained a respect and sympathy for the Castle which will save him from the loss of meaning and identity which life as a Castle outlaw would produce. K.'s quest is not completed. He has momentarily glimpsed synthesis of his two mutually-repelling goals, but he is not an apotheosized knight errant. The struggle to accommodate himself to the world while maintaining his integrity can end only with his life. His ultimate goal, redemption of the fallen Waste Land world, is attainable only to the extent to which his own life becomes a continual process of self-liberation, and, thus, an example and hope for others.

The positive nature of K.'s enactment of his role as knight errant is attested to by the light tone of The Castle's

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[88] Emrich, Kafka, p. 490. [89] Ibid., p. 481.

[90] Ibid., p. 490.

last chapters. The foreboding, sinister atmosphere that characterizes the concluding chapters of The Trial is clearly absent here. More importantly, further grounds for optimism exist in the presence of cyclical imagery which suggests that K. is actually involved in a mythic process which is leading toward rebirth. Shortly before the novel breaks off, K. makes plans to retreat with Pepi to the little room in the Herrenhof where she had lived as a chambermaid. Pepi describes her life there as "quite lost and forgotten; . . . like working down a mine."[91] There, where everything is "warm and snug and tight,"[92] K. will hide himself from the cold. But he will not be bound to an underground life. "When spring comes"[93] K. will be free to return to his pursuits in the world outside. K. will undergo a ritual death, but not the other-inflicted death of a scapegoat. His is a descent into the underworld from which K. will emerge triumphant, symbolically reborn. There is a strong resemblance here to traditional romance, in which "the enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, fertility, vigor and youth."[94]

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[91] Kafka, Castle, p. 379.

[92] Ibid., p. 406.

[93] Ibid., p. 407.

[94] Frye, Anatomy, p. 188.

Kafka qualifies his hopeful ending by suggesting that K.'s rebirth (and thus the redemption of man from the Waste Land) may be postponed indefinitely. As Pepi tells K.:

> "Well, yes, some day spring comes too, and summer, and there's a time for that too, I suppose; but in memory, now, spring and summer seem as short as though they didn't last much longer than two days, and even on those days, even during the most beautiful day, even then sometimes snow falls."[95]

But the qualification does not cancel the hopeful note which has been established by the final chapters and foreshadowed by Hans Brunswick's optimistic prophecy:

> . . . for the moment K. was wretched and looked down on, yet in an almost unimaginable and distant future he would excel everybody.[96]

K.'s future is pictured as "absurdly distant" and contingent upon "glorious developments."[97] Yet, that it is pictured at all is proof that K. has come a long way on his quest, and that K. is a long way from Joseph K.

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[95] Kafka, Castle, p. 408.

[96] Ibid., p. 197.

[97] Ibid.

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