

## **Kafka and sacrifice**

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### **Abstract**

The author explores the central importance of death in Bakhtin's carnival and notes that death is joyfully accepted as it gets rid of the old and makes space for the new. Death for Bakhtin is "life's regeneration". But in many societies both simple and sophisticated this is not the case. Here we deal with a sacrificial logic where death is feared and displaced onto a sacrificial victim who is killed for the benefit of the majority. Although we like to think of modern society as being beyond sacrifice we see it in many cultural formations. The author uses anthropology as an interpretive key to explain the story of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Indeed the *Metamorphosis* reads like a purificatory rite in which one member of the social group (a family) becomes a monster (the insect, literally) and is slowly but systematically rejected by the other members of his family. In the end, Gregor the insect/family member who has become a kind of filthy cockroach, dies to save his family from further disgust. His body is disposed of anonymously. At the end of the story we see Gregor's sister has bloomed into adolescence and so (without doing too much damage to the text) we can interpret the story as a kind of spring purification rite to discard the bad and the rotten and bring in the good and the fertile.

**Keywords:** Kafka, Bakhtin, carnival, sacrifice, scapegoat

I wish to begin by setting out what I believe to be the central thesis of Mikhail Mikhajlovič Bakhtin's philosophy of carnival. Bakhtin states his position quite starkly in the introduction to his work:

«Leonardo da Vinci said: "When a man awaits the new spring, the new year, with joyful impatience, he does not suspect that he is eagerly awaiting his own death". Although da Vinci's aphorism is not expressed in grotesque form, it is based on the carnival spirit». (Bakhtin, 1984:50)

What then, is this carnival spirit? It is the acceptance that all human beings are born and die and that with their birth and death new meanings, new truths are born and, in their turn, the old are interred by the new creations of history. This constant discontinuity in the continuation of human society is the basis of Bakhtin's theme of carnival, it is the playing boy of Heraclitus, it is the acceptance of the creative and destructive force of time.

The hero of his philosophy is time itself. It is in time that we are created, matured and destroyed. It is with time that empires rise and fall. Bakhtin's notion of carnival is steeped in time. Set against the continuous acceptance of the temporal is the old authority and truth which pretends «to be absolute, to have an extratemporal importance» (Bakhtin, 1984:212). The representatives of this impossible truth (the age lasts in Rabelais's work) strut the stage majestically, and consider their foes to be the enemies of eternal truth. These men

«do not see themselves in the mirror of time, do not perceive their own origin, limitations and end; they do not recognise their own ridiculous faces or the comic nature of their pretensions to eternity and immutability. And thus these personages come to the end of their role still serious, although their spectators have been laughing for a long time». (Bakhtin, 1984:213)

It is this sense of immortality and immutability that carnival transgresses and this is what gives sense to the crownings and uncrownings of kings and queens which is the central motif of chapter five on popular festive images:

«It is gay and free play, but it is also full of deep meaning. Its hero and author is time itself, which uncrowns, covers with ridicule, kills the old world (the old authority and truth), and at the same time gives birth to the new. In this game there is a protagonist and a laughing chorus. The protagonist is the representative of a world which is aging yet pregnant and generating». (Bakhtin, 1984:207)

The central startling image for this concept is found in the terracotta statues from Kerch. They were found in a *grotto* which gave the name to the "grotesque". These statues are of ancient women who are pregnant and they are laughing.

But Bakhtin's greatest achievement is in his reversal of the normal concepts of high and low, or, to be more precise, the creative and the deathly. For in Bakhtin's conception of medieval carnival, all that is low and connected to the earth is creative; all that is on high and connected with the heavens, with a disavowal of our guts and what falls from our guts to the earth, is frozen in time and therefore deathly: «The entire spiritual topography is turned upside down» (Bakhtin, 1984:378). What follows is his masterstroke. What is connected to death is life and rebirth. What is connected to eternity is lack of movement, stasis, or death without rebirth. Thus Rabelais's world is directed toward the «underworld, both earthly and bodily» (Bakhtin, 1984:370). The generative guts of a human being are made analogous to hell, the guts of the earth. Hell in Rabelais has a fearless carnivalesque quality. It is «inverted in relation to the outside world. All who are highest are debased, all who are lowest are crowned» (Bakhtin, 1984:383). Thus, in Bakhtin's inverted world, it is hell and its temporal, generative qualities that ensure rebirth, rather than the fixed eternity of heaven:

«The mighty thrust of all folk images into the absolute lower stratum, the element of time they contain, and the ambivalent nature of the underworld are opposed in Rabelais to the abstract hierarchical tendency to ascend. Rabelais sought the real world and real historical time, not on the upper level but in the lower depths». (Bakhtin, 1984a: 403)

Just as in the bowels of the body the human being is born so in the bowels of the earth is man spiritually reborn and death, like love, makes the world go round: «Death is the 'other side' of birth» (Bakhtin, 1984: 407). It is this singular attitude to death that informs Bakhtin's philosophy of laughter.

Perhaps, it should not surprise us that the critics of our modern age should sweep death under their carpets, to leave us with a sanitised version of the ideas of carnival, which have now become hedonistic, eternally gleeful, shallow and unphilosophical. This is the very reverse of Bakhtin's project. Without death, Bakhtin realised, there can be no new beginnings and we are then condemned to live in the endless illumination of a world without movement, our own empire where the sun never sets. Without the death of the old there can be no birth of the new. «For death is life's rejuvenation» (Bakhtin, 1984:405).

For Bakhtin the laughter of medieval carnival was ambivalent in that it was denigrating and resurrecting at the same time. By its connection with the lower bodily stratum, with urine, excrement, the guts, sexuality, death and the earth, laughter is associated with all the matter that enfolds the end and the beginning of life. Laughter in Bakhtin's world is destructive and regenerative. However I cannot help feeling qualms here because laughter has lost its dangerous element and is seen as the property of only the upright and the just:

«It was understood that fear never lurks behind laughter (which does not build stakes) and that hypocrisy and lies never laugh but wear a serious mask. Laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian; it did not convey fear but a feeling of strength». (Bakhtin, 1984:95)

The aggression of laughter is turned against only fixed official truths which few could argue with. But in his rhetorical strategy, Bakhtin has left out the other side of laughter, the aggressive and sometimes sadistic side, which leads to the position he adopts towards laughter being unbalanced and too positive: «Laughter could never become an instrument to oppress and blind people. It always remained a free weapon in their hands» (Bakhtin, 1984:94). Bakhtin, although he had been interrogated, writes as though he had never heard a sadistic laugh or seen the clownish nature of dictators, a tradition of dark comedy captured by Chaplin, Brecht and Manea (Manea, 1994).

## **THE DARK SIDE OF THE CARNIVALESQUE**

In 1837 when a man called Greenacre was hanged for murdering and dismembering a woman, a thousand people stayed outside Newgate all night. By morning the numbers had swollen dangerously. A fair was set up. Piemen sold “Greenacre pies” and ballad singers hawked pictures. The crowd cheered at the appearance of the scaffold and the executioner. Greenacre himself was greeted by a storm of terrific yells. There were more cheers as he was dropped and in his body «hung quivering in mortal agonies, the eyes of the crowd were rivetted upon the swaying corpse with a kind of satisfaction... So loud was the shout which hailed the exit of the poor wretch, that it was distinctly heard at the distance of several streets» (Gatrell, 68-9).

There were other common scenes of carnivalesque gaiety associated with public punishment. At the Charing Cross Pillory, the victims were exposed at lunch hour when the streets were most crowded. Overlooked by a sheriff, the crowd was expected to bring cats, eggs, decayed cabbages and dung with which to pelt the victim. The person in the pillory could easily lose an eye and could die of his stoning, especially if he were convicted of “unnatural crimes”. A woman convicted of impersonating a man in marriage with three different women lost both eyes in 1777. A homosexual died in 1780 (Gatrell, 69-70).

In some ways, however, the dying and the dead were granted supernatural powers. A touch of the dead man was considered to cure warts and tumours. There is a documented case of a woman touching her breasts with the executed man’s hands to cure her of her ailments.

What we are considering here is something quite different from Bakhtin’s carnivalesque but which contains certain similar features, the crowds, the hilarity and the dung-throwing. But what unites this crowd is not their own vulnerability and sensibility, but rather the fact that the victim of social exclusion and in extreme cases death is “over there” separated from and unifying the crowd at the same time. This calls to my mind a variety of situations in which social cohesion is achieved through the creation of an inside outsider, an “enemy within” to use Margaret Thatcher’s phrase concerning the miners. This situation may be typified in the scapegoat, the village idiot, sacrifice of so-called primitive societies, the pharmakos of Athens (of which more later), the Jews, lepers and madmen of Europe, from the thirteenth century up until the present day, the communists of America and the capitalists of the former Soviet Union.

What I might characterise as the central theme of this investigation is the human necessity to exclude in order to make coherent the formal narrative of their society.

## **THE DISPLACEMENT OF DEATH**

The human being appears to be an anxious animal and is no way comforted in this by the knowledge of his own death. However many health drives he undertakes, however many gymnasiums he visits, however handsome, however commanding his use of rhetoric, death appears to lie in wait for him, uncontrolled and uncontrollable. A story captures this neatly with the inevitability of the Oedipus story:

«A young man rushes to the house of his friend.

“Can you help me?” he pleads. “Can you lend me a horse? I must ride away to Samarka.”

“Of course you can borrow my horse,” replies the friend. “But tell me, what’s the matter? Why are you so frightened?”

The young man quickly explains: “I was in the village square. I saw Death there. He looked at me strangely and reached out his hand to me. I must ride away to Samarka.” His friend gives him the horse and the young man rides away. The friend becomes inquisitive. He goes to the village square and finds Death, sitting in a quiet corner. The friend confronts him.

“Why did you frighten my friend?” he asks. “Why did you look at him strangely and reach out towards him?”

“My humble apologies”, replies Death. “I did not mean to frighten him. But I was confused, because I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarka”».

Death in such stories is like love: it always finds a way, although it tends to be more reliable.

How, then, can a human being, if unable to avoid death, at least avoid the fear of death? The answer is to displace it. Death is something that happens to everyone else. For the narcissistic ego is unaware of its own death. This attitude is expressed by Freud in the joke of two young lovers on a train. The young man turns to his love and announces, “If one of us should die, I’ll move to Paris”.

But if the fear of death stalks us «like a madman with a razor» in Tarkovsky’s words, we need to continually displace it and control it. We need to see it regularly “out there”.

I shall now try and weave together some of the themes through anthropology, history, and literature to try to identify the narrative of sacrifice.

## LITERATURE

The *Metamorphosis* is a culmination of Kafka's reflection on his sacrificial position within the family. In *Metamorphosis* he manages to convey the distaste combined with horror that the sacrifice victim seems to manage to perpetrate on his victims. Remember, it is not what the accusers have done that will cause the sacrifice, but what they think the sacrificial victim has done to them. What the victim does in *Metamorphosis* is to wake up as a giant beetle: «When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect» (Kafka: 76).

What a strange beginning and how inspired. It is like the paradox of waking up into a dream. Why should anyone wake up as a monstrous insect? Why should anyone write of waking up as a monstrous insect? It is strange and fascinating. The rest of the family back off from him united in the horror of revulsion at their dangerous member of the family. But in what way is Gregor Samsa frightening? What kind of "monstrous insect" is he?

«He was lying on his hard shell-like back and by lifting his head a little he could see his curved brown belly, divided by stiff arching ribs, one of which his numerous legs, which were pathetically thin compared to the rest of his bulk, danced helplessly before his eyes». (Kafka: 76)

Could it be possible that Gregor Samsa has been transformed into a piece of excrement on legs? This is a question that we must leave hanging for a while, waiting for its possible confirmation, but certainly whatever he has been turned into, he is not quite human anymore. In his mind, for the next two pages, Gregor Samsa is occupied with the constant anxieties of a struggling travelling salesman. He's worried about getting up in time, except that he realises that he's also slept through the alarm. This worries him greatly because it means he's letting down his boss at work and his family.

There is a certain horrified pleasure for the reader at the split which Kafka has brilliantly organised here. The split is between the neurotic and anxious-to-please travelling salesman and this *thing* that he has turned into, this realisation of the family's unconscious wishes. How sublimely normal everyone is while still ignorant of his transformation. His sister and father call out to him to get up and tell him he's late while the beetle struggles to get off the bed and onto his legs. He even calls out to them in his new strange voice, but as he is talking through the locked door, or perhaps because they are so busy, they do not notice.

Gregor's struggle with himself continues. But then the chief clerk from the office actually arrives at the house to enquire why Gregor hasn't turned up for work. At this point, the insect, Gregor Samsa tips himself out of the bed and crashes to the floor, increasing the alarm of those outside.

Gregor's parents explain to the petty clerk in an obsequious fashion that their son must be ill – he is, but if only they knew how! – as Gregor struggles with his body to reach the door and attempt to unlock it. But the chief clerk loses his patience. He decides Gregor Samsa is barricading himself into his room and he has taken it into his head to act in an outrageous manner. He says he can't understand it for he has always taken Gregor Samsa to be «a quiet and reasonable young man» (84). However, later on, the chief clerk announces that for some time now Mr Samsa has been neglectful of his duties, in fact, «his position in the firm is no longer assured» (84). This lack of consistency should not surprise us. It is both part of the dreamlike quality of Kafka's writings and part of the ritualistic quality of criticising the scapegoat. There is no reasoning behind it and the angle of attack can change within the same speech.

Unfortunately, at this moment Gregor Samsa forgets that he is a giant insect and launches into a self-defence. He's fine, just had a slight dizzy spell, that's all. He'll be on the next train to work, that's for sure. He even asks the chief clerk not to waste time waiting for him. He promises he'll be at the premises in no time.

Such sentiments would be fine coming from a travelling salesman, but unfortunately, they emanate from an enormous bug and his parents cannot follow a single word that he is saying. This alarms them further and they want to call a doctor, fetch a locksmith to find out what exactly is happening in there.

Just at this moment, the beetle, their son, manages to unlock and open the door to his bedroom. He enters into the social world for the first time as an insect and this is the reaction:

1) The chief clerk utters an “oh” like a rushing of wind, as he claps his hand to his open mouth and starts backing away as if pushed by an invisible force.

2) His mother first looks to his father with her hands clasped, and then falls to the floor, her face buried in her breast.

3) His father clenches his fist with a menacing expression, looks uncertainly at the room around him and then breaks into a sobbing that shakes his chest.

Gregor Samsa realises that he has upset everyone. He has obviously ruined the sacred morning routine for he notices that the breakfast table is laid and remembers that his father believes that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. But, once again, he forgets that he is a louse and launches into another nervous speech, announcing that he will get dressed immediately.

How can we make sense of this extraordinary beginning? Is it simply the literary grammar of the absurd, allowing for many partial (and therefore mistaken) representations? Or is there a simpler and more telling analysis that leads to a fuller interpretation of Kafka's artistic achievement? Is it not possible that Kafka is writing about a true, but absurd, situation: about what it feels like to be the insect in the family?

Gregor is the person who has let everybody down. He makes his mother nearly faint, he moves his father at first to tears and then to anguished exasperation and he frightens everyone away. He is not, as Ronald Hayman asserts, verminous only to his father but to the whole family group, and those outside it, for that matter. Kafka is writing about what it feels like to be the “it” of the family, the one who has lost all social and human characteristics for the whole group. The tragic irony that the story maintains is that this “it” is a thinking, sensitive human being who is, agonisingly, able to maintain his sense of self while all those around him cannot treat him as a “thou”, as an equal human being. This would also explain the dirty, fecal element of the story for, in many ways, this story is a ritual *catharsis* of that which is unclean in the family. This story is a repetition of ritual renewal. This then is our hypothesis in analysing and critically appreciating this story. We must look to the next parts to see if these initial ideas can be corroborated.

The story continues. Poor Gregor Samsa. He is continuously and guiltily aware of the distress he has brought upon the household. At the thought that his parents and sister might have to work for a living instead of relying upon him makes him feel «hot all over with shame and grief». He realises he is a thorn in the flesh of his family, something that is impossible for them to contemplate and so he hides away in an attempt to spare their feelings. He is full of remorse for what he has done to them. He quite understands that the maid wishes to be freed from her employment. There is only one positive relationship that the insect can maintain and that is the one that he develops with his sister.

It is difficult to write about this relationship because it is so poignant and heart-breaking. Without this relationship the “it” the bug of the family would have no hope of contact at all. His father seems only to have barely disguised murderous feelings. He seems to be killing his mother. Only the sister shows any sign of acceptance. And yet the relationship is unbearably painful. Why?

At first, Grete, Gregor’s sister, leaves a bowl of milk in his room with pieces of bread soaked in it. Gregor is attracted by the smell and remembers it was his favourite food when he was human but somehow, now, he can’t bring himself to eat it. The next morning Grete is surprised to find the bowl full and she picks it up and takes it away not, of course, with her bare hands «but with a cloth». For everything that Gregor is now connected with is, somehow, dangerous and contagious. But then, Grete returns and out of the «goodness of her heart» she gives him a selection of foods for her brother to try. These are old, half decayed vegetables, bones from last night’s supper and other suitably disgusting items. Gregor eats all the rotten things with great relish, much to his surprise, and then his sister re-enters with a broom, sweeps up the left-overs into a bucket, which she covers with a wooden lid, before she leaves.

There is something in Grete’s actions which cannot but touch the heart. Gregor’s parents have, evidently, in their fear and anger been unable to approach the insect, their son. Grete is the only person who seems to remember that this is her

brother and she tries to overcome her fear, loathing, revulsion and disgust in order to help him.

But, on the other hand, here we see in her actions something which also freezes the heart. It is obviously such hard work for Grete to overcome her feelings of rejection that we fear she cannot be kind to the beetle forever. Whenever she enters the room, she holds her breath and rushes to open the window before she can breathe in. But there is something more to arouse our anxiety. Her good deeds seem to be moved by pity rather than by love and even in her kindness she seems to be slowly dehumanising her brother. As the routine of feeding begins to establish itself, his sister begins to talk, but not to him, only about him, in front of him, about how much he has eaten that day. She presumes that he cannot understand what she says although, in fact, the reverse is true: he understands them but they cannot interpret any of his signals.

Thus, Grete's good intentions lead towards a further objectivisation of her insect/brother; in fact she is treating him as any kind-hearted person would treat a giant insect. This leads to the set-piece scene that dominates the second section of the story. Gregor has by now taken to crawling up the walls and ceilings of his room, as any insect would. His sister, Grete, has gently moved certain pieces of furniture in order for him to practice his new found pursuits more freely. But then Grete decides that she will clear the room entirely of any obstacles to his new recreations. As she has become the sole caretaker of the insect, her brother, since his parents cannot bear to be near him, she takes decisions concerning his welfare in a rather high-handed manner.

Of course, Grete cannot move all the furniture in Gregor's room by herself and so she solicits the help of her mother. She makes sure, on entering, that the insect, Gregor, is hidden away under the sofa (his customary position for receiving and hiding himself from visitors). Then mother and daughter set to work and take out various pieces of furniture. At first, Gregor the insect is pleased at how much care they are taking for his welfare. But then, Gregor, the human being begins to despair over what they are taking away from him: his last remnants of humanity. Thus upon one of the exits of his sister and mother, Gregor breaks from his cover runs up a wall and fixes himself firmly upon a picture that he has always particularly liked. In this story it is always Gregor's humanity and finer feelings that lead to his downfall. This is something we see later in the story.

Mother and daughter return. Grete catches sight of the giant beetle, her brother, on the picture and tries to maintain her composure, but she suggests to her mother that they repair to the living room. But this puts Mother on her guard and she looks round and catches sight of the «huge brown patch», who seems to be sitting on her flowered wallpaper, and she screams out loud and falls into a dead faint (105).

For the first and last time, direct words are spoken to Gregor by a member of his family. They are: «You, Gregor!», spoken by his sister. He is to blame for his

mother's life-threatening reaction to his appearance. He is naughty. The only words that can be spoken in this context are incoherent and angry.

Then Grete rushes out of the room in search of medicines for Mother. Gregor follows her out of the room, hoping to help her, this action being more a product of their previous life together than serving any useful purpose now. However, Gregor, the insect, rushes into the kitchen to help his sister. She rushes back out with the medicines and kicks the door to Gregor's room shut to keep him out. «Now Gregor was cut off from his mother, who was perhaps nearly dying all because of him» (105). All this sensitive insect can do is crawl around in an agony of self-reproach, waiting for the door of his room to open, so that he can see his mother once more.

A door does open but, unfortunately, it is not the door to his room, but the front door; his father has returned home. On hearing that his wife is seriously ill as a result of Gregor, the insect, breaking loose, he begins to chase Gregor, his son, around the sitting room table and then starts throwing red apples at him, one of which lodges in his back. As Gregor himself faints, his mother comes rushing out of his room, throws herself at her husband and begs for Gregor's life.

Thus, we have established three different ways of relating to Gregor's insectitude. Undisguised aggression on the part of his father, tender hearted pity on the part of his sister and operatic contradictions recited by his mother which tell him how dangerous he is. None of them can relate to him, or react to him as though he were a human being.

They can accept him as a part of the family, but this simply adds to their shame and disgust. Indeed after father's attack upon Gregor, they all have to accept that «despite his present lamentable and repugnant shape Gregor was a member of the family». They simply have to put up with their misfortune. A kinder atmosphere develops. And so sometimes, during the evening, Gregor can watch his family sitting round, chatting and he finds out that they all have jobs now, menial ones to be sure, but they are keeping their heads above water.

Grete still brings him food, but takes less care about it, in fact, she leaves him practically anything and she doesn't clean up after him very well, either. But now an old maid comes into his room to see him and utters the only endearing words which he hears throughout the whole story which are: «Come along then, my old dung-beetle!» (113). Gregor begins to lose his appetite.

In their plight, the family take in lodgers. As they are always eager to please, they treat their lodgers with the utmost civility and servility. Even outsiders are treated with more respect than their monstrous insider.

Then, Kafka leads us into the third set-piece of the story. One evening, Gregor hears his sister playing the violin for the three lodgers. He has always loved his sister's violin playing. Now, he is enchanted. However, the three lodgers seemed to be rather bored by his sister's musical talents. Gregor creeps out of his room, now covered by dirt and dust, and creeps towards his sister. «Was he an animal that music could move him so?» (117). This new fit of humanity in the insect leads him to

further indiscretion. He is not going to save anyone from the sight of his unsightly body. He creeps a little closer to his sister.

We are heading towards a dramatic conclusion, but Kafka characteristically underplays the tension. Suddenly one of the lodgers sees the big beetle and points him out. All three now seem to find him much more interesting than his sister's music. Father, in his embarrassment, tries to push the three lodgers towards their room. Grete stops playing. Father finally manages to push the lodgers behind their door, not without them threatening to leave. Gregor slumps in exhaustion.

Grete, his sister, dramatically bangs the table. She is exhausted too. She has come to a decision, she realises that things cannot go on like this. She refuses to utter her brother's name in front of this monster and declares: «we must try and get rid of it. We've done everything humanly possible to look after it and put up with it. I don't believe anyone can reproach us in the slightest... We must try and get rid of it» (119).

Gregor's lifeline to humanity has been cut by his greatest ally in the family. He has become an object entirely. He has reached the position of "it".

Although exhausted, everyone seems rather shocked by their guilt and the realisation of the implications of their decision. His father finds his guilt for the first time and exclaims: «If only he could understand what we said... then perhaps we might be able to come to some arrangement with him...» (120).

The irony is agonising because, as we have pointed out before, Gregor can understand everything. But he cannot make himself understood. Grete, his sister, derides the possibility that her brother can understand them. If he could, she cries, then he wouldn't make them suffer like this, he would have gone away long ago. Now Gregor, her brother, the insect, the it, knows what he should do and turns himself round to return to his room. At this, his sister gives a rather exaggerated scream as though the former Gregor, the object of her disgust might still turn upon her. Gregor takes himself back into his bedroom.

He knows what he must do. He can no longer be accepted in his family. He must withdraw. Thus it is that Gregor Samsa, already weak with hunger and with a rotting apple lying in his back, withdraws from his family completely and dies. The cleaning lady finds him in the morning and shows him to the family who look on the dead insect with some disinterest. Father, Mother and daughter decide to take the day off from work and the cleaner comes to speak with them: «it's about the business of getting rid of that thing next door, well, you don't have to worry about it. It's all been seen to» (125). And now, for the first time, the family can break out from their claustrophobia and take a tramcar. And now, for the first time, Father and Mother begin to notice, also, that their daughter is blooming into a woman. She has crossed a threshold and Gregor was the family sacrifice.

That this reading of "The Transformation" is not so far fetched may be determined by recourse to Kafka's life. As his letter to his Father shows, Franz Kafka was always trying to live up to some standard that did not exist. As Hayman points out, Kafka seemed to have a highly developed death instinct, although this seems to

have been totally induced by his father. Kafka always thought that suicide was really the only way out.

There are some appreciations of the work of Kafka that see in it a remarkable prefiguring of the totalitarian state that was to come. It is not necessary to afford Kafka these qualities of prediction, because in fact, Kafka was writing out of his experience with his father. However, what we should not leave out is the connection between the two interpretations. For a totalitarian state is forever trying to cleanse itself of its dirtiness, of its shadow, of that which provides an obstacle to its eternity: Jews in the case of the Third Reich, capitalist spies in the former Soviet Union and communist infiltrators in the United States of the fifties and sixties. In an authoritarian family sometimes one of its members is chosen to be what's wrong with the family. This is evidently how Kafka felt within his own family. Thus *The Trial* writes out, in dreamlike political terms, what he had always experienced at first hand that the protagonist has got it wrong, although he never knows what the rules are. This is exactly how the trial of Josef K. begins: «Somebody must have made a false accusation against Josef K. for he was arrested one morning without having done anything wrong» (1).

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