



Nowhere to Go Kafka, a Philosophical Study

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Abstract: This paper applies analytical philosophical and rhetorical linguistic, or tropological, methods to Kafka's two main novels, *The Castle* and *The Trial*. The main tropes discussed and applied are metaphor, metonymy, and ambiguity in addition to some references to irony. The main background presupposition is that Kafka's text does not allow for consensual interpretation. Any reader may read the text as he or she likes. Instead of trying to formulate my own interpretation I adopt a tropological method. I try to show how especially ambiguity structures the text and guides the movement of its material content to form new images and meanings. This is not so much a new interpretation of Kafka's novels but a methodologically guided attempt to show how they can be studied without a commitment to a given interpretation.

Keywords: metaphor, metonymy, ambiguity, recognition, desire, the other

Trope: (in the philosophy of Santayana) the principle of organization according to which matter moves to form an object during the various stages of its existence.¹

¹ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/trope> (accessed 01/30/17); for Kafka, the key trope in this sense is *ambiguity* that, paradoxically, struggles against all objectification. To use ambiguity as a trope to organize the matter of the text is in itself an ambiguous strategy. Linguistically, *trope* is a figure of speech. In this paper I use tropes in both ways.

1. Traveling and Visiting

In Franz Kafka's short story "In the Penal Colony" the Explorer visit the colony where he is shown a strange machine by the Officer. It is used for legal executions in the service of the law and justice,

"It's a remarkable apparatus," said the Officer to the Explorer and gazed with a certain look of admiration at the device, with which he was, of course, thoroughly familiar. It appeared that the Traveler had responded to the invitation of the Commandant only out of politeness, when he had been asked to attend the execution of a soldier condemned for disobeying and insulting his superior. Interest in this execution was not really very high even in the penal colony itself. At least, here in the small, deep, sandy valley, closed in on all sides by barren slopes, apart from the Officer and the Traveler there were present only the Condemned, a vacant-looking man with a broad mouth and dilapidated hair and face, and the Soldier, who held the heavy chain to which were connected the small chains which bound the Condemned Man by his feet and wrist bones, as well as by his neck, and which were also linked to each other by connecting chains. The Condemned Man, incidentally, had an expression of such dog-like resignation that it looked as if one could set him free to roam around the slopes and would only have to whistle at the start of the execution for him to return (Kafka 1988: 140).

How do we read this text? It is all about the law, guilt, and sentencing. The condemned man's crime is not honoring his superiors, which is something that tends to happen in Kafka's works. The man is an idiot, or a parody of Kafka's better known characters designated by the letter K, and the mentioned execution machine – an immensely complicated mechanism of horror and torture – reminds us of his novels. Of course a reader can easily deny such an interpretation. What Kafka wants to say is never clear, which is exactly what I want to say in this paper.

We will focus on two of his three novels. Two linguistic tropes structure the main narrative line of *The Castle* and *The Trial*, namely, meeting and visiting. The first is a high metaphor and the second a lowly metonym (Burke 1969: 503ff).² To be more specific, meeting is here a dynamic and

² *Metonym* is a linguistic trope or figurative expression like "My King won the battle." You can say as well "His army won the battle." In this example, both expressions refer to the same thing but in different ways so that the truth of the first logically entails the truth of the second. *Metaphor*, like "Girls are made of

vertical, normatively loaded metaphor of people moving from higher positions to lower and others at least trying to transfer upwards from low to high. When they succeed they meet, otherwise they miss each other. To meet is to recognize and hence to form an *ad hoc* social unit. Friends meet, lovers meet, business partners meet, but enemies never meet in the same sense; therefore, meeting that entails recognition is a metaphor of unity (Galeotti 2002: 14f). Bodies touch, they never meet, only souls do, if they do. In this sense, meeting is a linguistic trope, a metaphor, devoid of real world reference. When you say you want to meet someone significant the *de dicto* desire is perfectly understandable: meeting in this sense has its meaningful interpretation. Yet, its *de re* object looks essentially undefined as we do not know what it would be, at least not before you narrate the *de dicto* object in full, which, alas, is a Herculean challenge (Airaksinen 2012, 2014). In fact, recognition as a metaphor follows from amassing meaning on recognition as merely seeing something as something, like “to recognize a Ferrari in traffic.” When you see recognition in terms of meeting of souls you have arrived but it has been a long way to travel along the linguistic highway. For Kafka, society is and remains rigidly stratified; the high and mighty and the lowly ordinary people do not meet or mix, yet they occasionally come to contact when the high descend to the lower levels; what happens then is what Kafka tells about.

Visits: Both the mighty and the lowly visit each other’s abodes and offices, they may face each other as if to meet, which brings about all kinds of trouble. One might say those mock visits are the causes of much anxious irregularity in life. It is like trying to mix oil and water or put a square peg through a round hole. In fact, meeting, for Kafka, is its own antinomy because meeting tends to become a non-meeting, a mere visit, or an episode so strange we do not even have a proper word for. Hence, life is all about these anxiety ridden encounters where people fail to meet each other – such is Kafka’s ironic conclusion. In other words, people visit each other even when they do not recognize each other and in this way they visit without meeting or even meet without meeting. Certainly, as I said, they may meet and relate to other people, and even recognize them, at the horizontal level but never vertically. This looks like a parody of the class based society or even feudalism, which it is not. No such clear cut,

sugar and spice and everything nice,” is a figurative way of expressing what a literal expression cannot express. Notice that *metaphor* is different from *simile*, for instance, “He eats like a pig,” where his behaviour actually shares some key features with that of a pig. But if I say “Men are pigs” I use a metaphor. However, “My king in the battle acts like a lion” is a metaphor in spite of the apparent comparison: kings do not share properties with lions, except in a figurative sense. So, the sentence is false although the idea may be perfectly apt.

obvious, and easy interpretation of Kafka works, or if you try you will notice that everyone has his or her own diverse reading. Why try to say what Kafka wants to say? It is not important what he says, how he says it is crucial. At most his message indicates our incapability of meeting and recognizing each other, given our mutual otherness created by the fact of social stratification. However, I would hesitate saying even that much.

Totalizing metaphor in *The Castle*: a metaphor that captures the whole narrative and controls its plot determining what the narrative is all about so that everything else depends on it. It makes the narrative, or any part of it, a totality, a readable and unified case where all the elements hang on each other. In addition to such a totalizing metaphor the text is packed with partial or subsiding metaphors that emerge, flourish, make their impact, and vanish, perhaps re-emerging later. The third kind of metaphor is that of master metaphor or a metaphor that covers all others, whether they are totalizing or subsiding. Travel is such a metaphor, a metaphor that covers all others without being in itself in any way dominating. It is a more or less hidden metaphor. One additional type of metaphor exists: whatever happens, the castle sits there high on the hill and everything comes about in its shadow, so to speak. I call this a kingpin metaphor because it all revolves around it as particular fact although you may not see it. In *The Trial*, the totalizing metaphor is guilt, assumed, assigned, and denied. The kingpin is the particular image of a judge, for obvious reasons (see Doherty 1999, Ch.3).

Travel: People travel in three ways as they aimlessly wander around, they go to places, or they visit each other. Wandering is a master metaphor as it is associated with lack of roots, finding no home, aloofness, and loneliness. Wandering is aimlessness and dictates one's inability to find the right path, or Tao, which also entails anxiety and confused motives. J.-J. Rousseau's classic *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* initially presents him as a happy wanderer who truly enjoys his solitude, his own serene thoughts, natural scenery, and the freshness of new experience (Rousseau 1979 [1728]: 149). Yet, when you read on you find a bitter man who is forced to wander, like a wandering Jew, without rest or home rejected by all the people he once called friends: "I see nothing but animosity in the faces of men, but nature always smiles on me." He is a recluse. He is left wandering as it is the only thing he can still do. He is no longer recognized by them, some significant people, as he realizes and hence all is lost. The finest example of a wanderer is of course the Flying Dutchman, the cursed ghost of a sailor who must sail until he finds his true love. For hundreds of years this has not happened exactly because he is the cursed ghost of a man. He is the embodiment of the metaphor of travel as wandering and hence the denial of the right path, home, and the proper conclusion of the travel as a story. How could anyone recognize such a failed creature?

Wandering is, metaphorically, a never ending, meaningless narrative consisting of false starts. Kafka's K and Josef K are both wanderers in this sense. Jesus wanders here and there across Palestine with his twelve retarded acolytes. However, this case is ambiguous in a manner that is also relevant to Kafka's narratives: his wanderings are deceptive because they constitute his path back home that is in Heaven. In other words, he is wandering although he is on the right path to home – what is he doing? He is wandering aimlessly although his aim is clear; he has no home but he is going home. His traveling is both meaningful and goal directed and meaningless and random at the same time. It is an ambiguous narrative that we can, of course, easily disambiguate by adopting a mystical celestial or a factual dogmatic perspective. Monks have always wondered in this same ambiguous way. This linguistic ambiguity is in Santayana's sense a trope (see note 1), although it may sound paradoxical to maintain that ambiguity can structure anything. In Kafka's novels it is the only way, though.

People visit places: The land surveyor K comes to a miserable village at the foot of the castle hill in the middle of the winter. He knows he wants to get there and once he thought he had arrived. This is an illusion of course as he can never find his way to the castle. It is a cul-de sac, another metaphor of life's anxieties. People visiting each other is a totalizing metaphor, classified under travel, in *The Castle* and, to no lesser degree, in *The Trial*. Of course, visiting is not a success but a process concept: people visit and they fail to visit but they try. Josef K wants to visit law courts and their judges, which he fails miserably. He may see some portraits but they are doubtful. But he can visit other places and he does so. The villagers visit the castle and the castle officials visit the village, the villagers visit each other and K visits them. It is all about visiting when the real question is, do they ever meet each other? The result is that visiting threatens to collapse into a mere metonym as to visit simply means something like coming to see a place or a person, or arriving and leaving, and not much else. In this sense it is different from travelling and meeting, which have their richer metaphoric import like homelessness and unification of souls. Visiting is just an episode of life and not much more, like when dead planets travel and randomly and distantly visit each other in deep dark empty space.

I try to clarify the tropes like traveling, visiting, and meeting in Kafka's two major novels and then show how the narrative totality fails under the weight of its relentless ambiguation – fails not in any pejorative but in a structural sense of the word. To begin, people visit each other in time and place (now assuming metonymy) and then they also should meet each other (an obvious metaphor). Here meeting is involved in the disappearance of the other and the mutual understanding, sharing of values and goals, and overcoming social anxieties, which never happens in

vertical relationships. The high castle and the low village represent the otherness of the other in a non-contingent manner.³ This is the essence of the social universe whose vertical social order is beyond change or challenge and even understanding. All other social relations may be contingent and as such subject of change but never the vertical principle of the otherness of the other. Note that otherness logically entails ambiguity of identity: as an other you are and you are not a recognizable person. You are not recognized even if you should be. The social world is then ambiguous to the core.

Think the young messenger Barnabas in *The Castle*. When he enters the castle he can never be sure if he is in the castle or not. Often it seems clear that he is but then the illusion vanishes so that he does not know *de dicto* where he is; the corresponding *de re* interpretation presents no problem: he knows the location he is in but not its meaning or interpretation. He knows the place but not its name. In this sense Barnabas' life is in limbo, or in a state of permanent insecurity caused by its ambiguities; in other words, he is and is not in the castle, he meets and he does not meet the officials, he has and he has not a position in the castle,

He certainly goes into the offices, but are the offices really the castle? And even if the castle does have offices, are they the offices which Barnabas is allowed to enter? He goes into offices, yes, but that's only a part of the whole, for there are barriers, and yet more offices beyond them (Kafka 2009a: 154).

Such ambiguities signify his otherness in the castle and his essential inability to meet his superiors. They are there and they are not; hence, he can visit them but not to meet them. The rule is, you never meet what you cannot name; or, there is no nameless recognition. What you can do is to visit and perhaps more or less briefly observe. Olga informs K that the officials' means of transportation, in wintertime their sleighs, when they enter the village, are packed with papers, documents, forms, and books. "Oh", said K, "but I've seen the inside of an official sleigh that had no files in it at all". (Kafka 2009a: 190). As such this incident looks like a minor inconsistency but yet it hints at the subsiding metaphor of unknowability, a term that is normally used as a metonym, now exemplified in "The unknowability of the ultimate reality"; what it really refers to is a member of the familiar family of ambiguities: the papers are

³ The other or Other is a Lacanian notion, see e.g. <http://www.lacanonline.com/index/2010/05/what-does-lacan-say-about-desire> (accessed 01/03/17) and Evans (1996, 132-133).

there and they are not there. This is no logical contradiction because Olga's and K's observations may well differ. However, they fit the general pattern of observations about the castle that is permeated by its linguistic and structural ambiguity. Metaphors are always ambiguous to the core often in many dimensions because their meanings vacillate without preordained limits.

Visits without meeting anybody take place but not without anxiety caused by the irregularities of life brought about by such mock visits themselves. Both terms, meeting and visiting, are covered by the broad and thin master metaphor of travel in the sense that people, when they travel, visit each other in order to meet and overcome their own strangeness and otherness that so much troubles them. This is where all the narrative meaning concentrates as its totalizing moment. These are general considerations, too general, so that they need to be explicated in terms of what Kafka actually says. We have ample material available for this purpose embedded in the various sub-narratives his two novels provide. Kafka is of course a master of false concreteness, comic embellishments, and fake details when he tells about the life and visits of his main characters. He narrates ordinary life and average people along with all their plans, desires, worries, and anxieties as if they mattered when the big quake arrives shaking them to the bone. Suddenly the otherwise normal world acquires novel features that obviously are real but which they cannot explain in any way known on the basis of observable fact. They now see things in a distorting mirror so that they fail to identify what they see. Something strange, something that travels from here to there, has arrived at where they are; or, something that they do not know how to meet visits them. This something can be an official from the castle up on the hill or two bailiffs with an arrest order for Josef K. They come, they change your life but you have no way of telling how, why, or when. You never meet them.

All this is based on the structure of metaphor that moves the meaning of a term into another context of discourse so that the original term now appears in a new and strange light that still, somehow, illuminates it. When I say that she has the heart of stone, what am I saying? I have now moved the discourse concerning her personality to that of stones and hearts combining two attributes that do not mix. Stones and hearts have no point of connection, yet their union illustrates her psychology. In this case, the meaning has travelled from individual psychology to the extraordinary world of stone hearts; hence, meanings travel like persons and then the question is, do meanings ever meet? In good metaphors they do. In other words, can Kafka express what he wants to express? The point concerns more the general idea of visiting and meeting than about what Kafka says.

Visiting, as mere metonym, has one interesting dynamic feature that deserves our attention, namely its structural similarity with ambiguity. What is ambiguity? It is a matter of double meaning in a case where we cannot decide which meaning is the intended one. The two meanings stay separate and visible, one disturbing the other and confusing the vision based on this meaning. This is what I mean by the dynamics of ambiguity. The shift towards the other is a constant threat so that one cannot go on with the narrative and its logic without fear of detecting a further confusion along the road resulting from unresolved problems, or from ambiguity. Kafka's narratives cultivate this fear to the extreme, as I will show below. Psychologically speaking, my mind's eye travels between two competing meanings back and forth without finding solace. It is not really wandering, as it also may be described, but oscillation between two points, a kind of vicious circle that one cannot break however painful it may become. Linguistic ambiguity means visiting one meaning and then the other, or restless travel between two points without ever being able to decide where one should be. In other words, the meanings never meet. In this way, life is nothing but a confusion, just like narrating and reasoning are under the condition of ambiguity of meanings that all the time threaten to collapse into full equivocation that is the ultimate catastrophe of not being able to distinguish between the initial meanings any more. In this sense visiting and ambiguity are structurally isomorphic: my mind's eye repeatedly visits meanings that it must keep apart. When I visit I get there and back without being able or willing to stay. In the same way, in the case of an ambiguity, I visit linguistic meanings without being able or willing to fixate on the correct one. I will now show further how all this works in Kafka's two novels.

2. Sortini Visits

A land surveyor K travels from far in the midst of winter in order to visit a peasant village and then move on to Count Westwest's castle to meet the people who hired him. The count has never been seen and he has a very funny name. K is unable to enter the castle and so he is stuck in the village. He should go back home because this is the only reasonable thing to do, but his righteous desire to get what belongs to him, his job, keeps him at the village. He gradually and often painfully learns about the people and their life in the shadow of the castle on the hill above them. He visits Olga and her family and she tells him the story of her sister Amalia and its impact on their life. Apparently this is one of the many sub-narratives of crime and punishment in Kafka's works, or the stories of guilt and its anxieties. It is a separate narrative within a bigger picture and it deserves our attention as such.

The relevant plot is simple: a castle official named Sortini, who normally does not visit, visits the valley to attend a popular festival; they often descend from the hill to the valley to do some work there, what work is never made clear (Kafka 2009a: 165ff). They simply work hard, although this claim has its own ambiguities, too. The main point, however, is descending travel where the high come down to the low, or the officials to the level of the peasants. All of this is metaphoric: a high official travels and arrives and emerges at the valley where he disturbs its life and causes anxiety in many, often ambiguously and in the most subtle of ways. People are of course impressed to see such a high person in flesh but they also must suffer from it. They see the person only briefly so that they do not quite know whom they saw or even if they saw one. The officials seldom do anything extraordinary, except Sortini in this case. As I see it, the events are all described at the level of innocent metonymies, yet the travel related subsiding metaphors also are present and their effect of the narrative hinges on how these two types of tropes (do not) meet each other. Ultimately, it is not the people who fail to meet but the tropes, when they clash.

Sortini is a small, quiet, modest looking man (metonymically) but in actual fact he is big and mean (metaphorically). Such a paradiastolic tropology carries all the narrative weight in this case so that this ironic vision of him is the fully ambiguous reason why Amalia falls in love with the man although she is not in love with him. Sortini is not in love with Amalia; they do not love the ladies of the valley they fornicate with as everybody knows. They sleep at whim with many women, or perhaps with any woman, as they need not care. The officials do not meet and recognize the women. However, all sex tends to be ambiguous and anxious anyway as the copulating persons may meet each other or not. When they actually meet is difficult to say: in a paid encounter the customer and the sex worker may meet but a couple may not meet in the lovers' bed.

Sortini sees Amalia, a handsome young woman and, lecherous as these people from the castle tend to be, he pays attention. He comes close, too close, to recognizing her and hence is accidentally shaken by Amalia. Now the plot changes its tone and metaphysical import: Sortini reads the meeting in a fancy way interpreting it as a personal insult and reacts accordingly. He writes an incredibly rude and nasty letter to the family pouring all kinds of unreasonable threats and slurs on them. His rage is overpowering and totally out of character of a high official from the castle, as one may ideally think of him, yet this is what they occasionally do. He orders her to come immediately to see him in a guesthouse, which she proudly and courageously refuses to do. But as Olga says, this may show either love or disgust, or both. Nothing is univocal here.

The letter and the denial mix to work like poison whose effects spread throughout the community making them, all the family, despised and isolated. No one wants to meet them, this is their punishment, actually they cannot meet them anymore as the case moves away from the circle of contingencies towards the iron necessity of punishment, which is of course fully ambiguous in nature. No declaration of guilt and no formally required punishment exist, yet all the village knows what they are. The whole family turns into “an other,” a situation that cannot be changed or corrected. No one visits them anymore, they must move, the paths of vertical travel vanish, people do no longer recognize them – in a word, they are doomed. In Sortini’s vision of Amalia, his shock, his emerging desire, his anger, his letter, and his demand to see her they all form a network of metonyms that apply to this singular event and spell out its nature forming a base for the tropes like travel, visit, and meeting. They concentrate and focus on the meaning of the event guiding it towards the recognition of its full metaphysical import. In an ironic manner, *Veni, Vidi, Vici* does not apply here as Sortini is no Julius Caesar. Amalia is so proud and stubborn that Sortini cannot win, which makes his rage understandable. She can resist Sortini but then the punishment becomes necessary: to stop all the travel around her. Life is travelling and travelling is life, so she hardly lives any more.

Indeed, this is a travel story where Sortini arrives and acts, the villagers including Amalia remain passive; Sortini does not meet them, although he (almost and falsely) recognizes Amalia. However, everything goes wrong when prospective recognition turns into hatred and rage that poisons the social environment and turns a good artisan family into anxious untouchables devoid of all hope. Sortini is dangerous and certainly he seems like bad news wherever he might arrive. He is a threat to the community members who have no defences against him, no rampart, no weapons to counter the effects of his actions and moods – in fact the villagers do not want to do anything about it as if to affirm the non-contingency of their fate. The castle and its officials have in many ways a big impact on the village, that is clear, but the village has no impact on them, except in this one special case where Amalia’s beauty disturbs Sortini. The rule is, no bilateral impact and this rule is now breached, hence the crime and punishment. It is certainly not Amalia’s fault. Of course we are not discussing a personal or intended action and its effects but a metaphysical event where the rule that is the non-contingent foundation of the village-castle relationship no longer applies. This is a fatal mishap that ruins their social environment. Yet, Olga says, “Well, his abuse of power failed here, because his intentions were stated clearly, were entirely transparent, and he found a stronger opponent in Amalia” (Kafka 2009a:168), which is at the same time wishful thinking and a revelation:

you fail, she thinks, if your intentions are not sufficiently ambiguous. But Sortini still rules.

Those who travel never meet those who do not even know when and why they are visited. Here visiting is a mere metonym devoid of deeper meaning but meeting, on the contrary, is a metaphor of the whole, unified, and comprehensible world order where recognition dwells. What you meet constitutes a unity. Sortini comes and goes, he visits this place and that, but they never meet him in the sense that the chasm between them remains open. The rule says they cannot meet – this is the correct modality unlike that of must – yet now they (almost) did; hence, Amalia is indeed doomed.

Travel is also the metaphor of autonomous desire, so autonomous that it does not allow any bi-directionality, when I arrive at my destination and get what I want independently of you and your desires. This is to say I never meet you but, then, I do not need you either. You are an object who cannot want anything from me. Such train of thought makes a high official. As Olga says, all of them, the whole village, may be part of the castle and belong to the castle, “Yes, it is said that we all belong to the castle” (Kafka 2009a:172), which obviously means that nothing Kafka would say about visiting, recognition, and meeting makes much sense in the end. Nevertheless, taken together, these two positions again form, through a rhetorical paradiastole, a wonderfully ambiguous textual context. Think of it. We hear that all villagers might belong to the castle and that not much difference obtains between us and them. Otherwise, the narrative that is *The Castle* makes it clear that the differences are all encompassing, eternal, and rigid. What happens here is that two brief, incidental sentences attack the great edifice of *The Castle* threatening to demolish it. The threat is empty of course but yet its occurrence trumpets another emerging ambiguity. Perhaps K already is in the castle and has met its people? The answer must be in the negative but that is not the point. The point is that such things are said.

3. Klamm Visits

Klamm, another castle official, is a monstrously ambiguous character without identity, a virtual brother of Ulrich, or Ulbricht, or actually a much more abstract version of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Klamm’s appearance and virtually everything in him changes and it changes so much that sometimes people cannot be certain whether Klamm indeed is Klamm. Olga offers an explanation of the ambiguity of his character by saying that every time he physically appears or is even mentioned one is so charged with emotion and anxiety that it cannot fail to influence the perception itself. Olga acts like an amateur psychologist tempting the reader to accept this naïve explanation. Some may do so although I do not see why they

should. Olga's theory is an obvious one but an attentive reader easily notices its hollowness. The problem is that Klamm appearance, action, and identity are so fluid and radically ambiguous that no psychological explanation extends that far. The same can be said of the castle itself: it is not clear who belongs to the castle and what rooms and locations are in the castle. It is indeed a nice ambiguity, namely, what rooms belong to the castle and what rooms there are in the castle, or am I now in the castle and in what room of the castle am I now? And as we know the castle is no castle but a group of houses. Such ambiguous facts may not depend on anxious perception. Olga tries to translate her worries into an indirect form of speech or *oratio obliqua* when Kafka's text suggests direct *oratio recta* form, so that this is the actual problem. The castle and Klamm are ambiguous to the core but Olga expresses it (wrongly) indirectly: To us these things look unclear because we are too emotional and anxious to be able to perceive clearly.

The alleged Klamm may not have anything in common with the real one, the similarity may be visible only to Barnabas, whose eyes are blinded by his excitement, the man may be the lowest of the officials, he may not even be an official at all, but he has some kind of work to do at that desk (Kafka 2009a:162).

Oratio obliqua does not do in this context because the whole point is to say directly that these things are objectively and intrinsically formless and thus ambiguous. Klamm is horrible to see, as we would say such a creature is who has no fixed form or identity. His actions are equally ambiguous and so is the castle itself, which is here indicated by the confusion between *oratio recta* and *oratio obliqua*.

Klamm visits the village in his sleigh to do some work there. He comes in fast and rushes into a guesthouse where he works some time. He is always busy and hard at work, yet he has ample time for sex and he also seems to work in bed rather sporadically. It is all ambiguous, even the fine brandy in his sleigh is not what it should be: it is mere cheap booze for low class people although Klamm is high class, which creates yet another ambiguous detail within the main narrative.

Can this really be cognac? K wondered, tasting it out of curiosity. Yes, it was cognac, remarkably enough, burning and warming him. But as he drank it, it turned from something that was little more than the vehicle of sweet perfumes into a drink more suitable for a driver. Is it possible? K. wondered again, as if reproving himself, and he drank once more (Kafka 2009a: 92).

The drink is first said to be cognac by the driver, then it is cognac, but when K drinks it the drink metamorphoses first into perfumed something and then into coarse booze. The drink has no fixed properties at all. It all depends on the context and the drinker, which indicates nothing but ambiguity and trivially exaggerated ambiguity for that.

Klamm is a rude man whose range of behavior is far too wide, yet he comes from the castle and is a high official, or ambiguously, not that high. Anyway, he should show some respect and behave according to the norms of his class – but of course he does not. He has no class. An extension of this problem is the role of K's assistants when they arrive in the village and go living with K and Frieda, who is K's lover and Klamm's, too. One can read the role of the assistants as an analogical extension of Klamm and Klamm's role. When they are in the castle the discipline is strict but in the village loose; this fact is offered as an explanation for their riotous and troublesome behavior – once again in vain. The loose and strict disciplines represent just another ambiguity that comes to trouble us and as such the discipline in the castle cannot explain its lack down in the valley. They are at the same time responsible assistants and rude hoodlums, which is an obvious metonymic pair expressed by means of an oxymoron or paradiastole.

Here is another subsiding metaphor: Klamm is an eagle, he is called an eagle and some non-published additions to the published text say his sleigh has an eagle's head at its front.

Klamm was far away; the landlady had once compared Klamm to an eagle, which had struck K as ridiculous at the time, but not anymore; he thought of Klamm's remote distance, his impregnable residence, his silence, perhaps interrupted only by such screams as K had never heard. He thought of Klamm's piercing glance from on high that would brook no contradiction and couldn't be tested either, of the immutable circles in which he soared, free from any interference by the likes of K down below, moving by inscrutable laws and visible only for brief moments – Klamm and the eagle had all this in common (Kafka 2009a: 103).

Klamm therefore is both *Adler* and *adel* or *adlig*. Of course all this is immediately denied – these things happen all the time when ambiguity starts looking like a contradiction. As such the eagle metaphor is indeed fascinating although it also is coarse – it is meant to be – and too obvious to be truly illuminating: an eagle is a paradigmatic metaphor of the king of birds, a noble soarer of unfathomable heights, a creature of the sharpest eye-sight, and the symbol of states and royals. In a word, it is a majestic metaphor. Klamm the eagle might even be seen ironically – like Eddie the

Eagle, the English Olympic ski-jumper. I do not think Klamm the eagle should be read thus as he really is an eagle. He is high and mighty when he flies down to the village and soars around spreading in his wake confusion, fear, and respect. Like Zeus he assumes a bird figure in order to rape local women who also love him dearly and miss him badly, although they do not love him and try to avoid him, always depending on what we mean by love. He flies in, when his sleigh moves so fast down the hill that he really is like an eagle. This simile provides the foundations of his metaphorical status of an eagle that extends far from his alleged nobility and ruling ability all the way his Zeus-trick of sleeping with anyone he happens to lust.

Of course eagles do not work that hard but every metaphor has its restrictions. In the end, Frida denies that she misses Klamm. She says, at the same time strangely quantifying Klamm's klammhood, that too much of Klamm rules here and hence she wants to get away. Indeed, Klamm is everywhere and that is too much, which is to say that he too has turned into venom that leaks and spreads everywhere. In this case, he has no solid identity left in him, he is described at the same time in qualitative and quantitative terms. He is an individual person Klamm, but also a figureless mass of things of which there is too much.

4. Josef K Visits

The fundamental scheme of *The Trial* is this: Josef K travels in order to visit somebody he could then meet and who would recognize him; or, meet those who have contacts to the higher realms of existence. He wants to ask questions because he desires to know what is happening to him. At the metonymic level, he wants to know the name of his crime: here guilt and name of crime form a metonymic pain. In the *Penal Colony* such knowledge is possible via a clever torture machine that ploughs the bare back of the victim until he is able to read the resulting pattern: now at last he knows the name of his crime. For instance, we learn that the crime is disobedience because the text to be written and read is "Honor you superiors." Here we have the name of the crime and its appropriate punishment. In fact, the punishment is to learn the name of the crime and so knowledge and punishment merge in the cruelest of ways. Amalia's crime is that she refused to follow Sortini's order to come and see him immediately. The crimes are the same in the "Penal Colony" and *The Castle* but punishment, as we know is different. Also, now we know the name of the crime and its punishment. When we compare these two cases to those described in *The Trial* the possible results are as follows: Crime is known and the nature of its punishment is also known; Crime is known but

its punishment is not declared, prearranged, or clearly defined; Crime is not known or named and its punishment comes as a surprise.

The plot in *The Trial* is new because the crime of Josef K has no name and hence all his attempts to clear his name must be in vain. His crime is unnameable, yet his guilt is undeniable and, therefore, his relevant desires are unsatisfiable. He is doomed. He has no hope but he does not know it or he refuses to admit it. That is why he still travels ever so restlessly from visit to visit seeing people who are the wrong people. They have no power or influence. Can he ever meet them? Let me next pay attention to three of his visits, first to the preliminary hearing of his case where he is in a situation where success might be possible, second he visits a court painter who kindly explains him what can be and what cannot be done – one cannot eradicate one's guilt or void the charges although much can be done to mitigate and postpone the case. He visits and meets a law court painter – not court painter – who has seen many judges and can tell something about them. He shows Josef K their painted portraits. In the third case in a cathedral where he has agreed to visit, he accidentally meets a priest who belongs to the law and who tells him the truth but in such an allegorical manner that it hardly benefits Josef K. The irony then is that you hear the truth when you cannot make sense of it. The truth is unknowable. Let us look into three of his visits where the visitor certainly does not soar like an eagle.

Preliminary Hearing (Kafka 2009b, Ch. 2): Josef K arrives late, one hour and five minutes late, which is an insult as such, and then he behaves aggressively, is overtly self-confident, and clearly displays his contempt of the court. He does not give the presiding judge any chance even to start the proceedings and then dominates the scene with his antics. He does not seem to have any idea of what he is doing and what this occasion is all about. He obviously believes that because he is innocent the whole process is ludicrous and hence he should show is. But as it is said to Josef K in the very beginning of the story, when the two bailiffs arrive in his room and take him to another room to be interrogated, how can he say he is not guilty when he at the same time admits that he does not know the law. Logically, it follows that one can never claim one is not guilty because the law is unknowable. Hence the key trope in *The Trial* is unknowability that is so deep it does not allow us to say what we cannot know. It is analogous to formless and objectless anxiety. Not much difference obtains between unknowability and anxiety anyway. They seem to form a metonymic pair.

Here the joke is based on the same play of tropes as in the case of Pontius Pilate's, "What is the truth?" Now we write it, "What is the law"; *de dicto* this means, "What is the meaning of the notion of law" and *de re*, "Is Josef K guilty of the crime he is accused of?" This crucial ambiguity is beyond Josef K as he constantly confuses them. From his point of view, he

should start from the *de dicto* interpretation, which he is not willing or able to do. He is in search of the law without knowing what it is. If the *de dicto* question is not answered first, the second or *de re* question makes no sense. He is not guilty in the sense that he has done nothing wrong, but he himself puts it wrongly: "I have done nothing," which is another matter or at least another ambiguity. The problem is, the law may be such that it is not necessary to do anything to be guilty; on the contrary, not doing may be enough or even more plausibly, to be something or somehow is enough – including not-being. Actually, anything can be the cause of one's guilt, always depending on how you read the notion of the law and the situation you are in. This is beyond the comprehension of Josef K. This becomes especially clear in the preliminary hearings. It should already be obvious on the first pages of *The Trial* but there it is too easy to retort to the *de re* interpretation simply because that depends on how we read such familiar terms as the law. Now, the linguistic ambiguity here proves fatal to Josef K. As the judge, if he is a judge, says he has caused himself great harm by missing this invaluable opportunity to clarify his position. Josef K refuses to accept the point and leaves the room. Thus, he visits the court but he refuses to recognize it and focus on its goals; he does not want to meet anybody there.

A Meeting with the Court Painter (Kafka 2009b, Ch. 7): Here Josef K meets the law court painter Titorelli, who is like a court painter who paints the portraits of the aristocrats in court – this is informative in its own sly way. Josef K seems to like the painter, after some hesitation, and the painter, who says he also is a trusted man of the law, is eager to give him his advice. They meet. Their meeting is supremely informative to Josef K but at the same time it is disheartening. Now, for the first time he realizes what his situation is like and what is the nature of his case before the law. He learns that his guilt cannot be eradicated, he will be stigmatized forever, he will be on thin ice the rest of his life, but he can still do something about it. Titorelli's blueprint of the available strategies is as follows: Temporary postponement, apparent exoneration, and true exoneration. Of these, the last one is possible but not really, which is another interesting ambiguity here: it is so rare an incident that it cannot happen but still it happens. Titorelli's advice is not to aim for it. From now on, Josef K's life will be an endless struggle with the law when he works to keep the case stagnated or, in the case of apparent exoneration, prepares to fight off the next wave of legal actions against him – when that will take place no one can tell. All this is highly discouraging, as Josef K now realizes. Titorelli also provides him much information about the law and the judges. We can summarize it as follows: the law court finds a great crime somewhere it did not exist earlier, the court persists on the case endlessly, everyone and everything belong to the court, except Josef K of

course, the highest court and its judges are invisible in the sense that nothing can be said about them, and concerning of how to paint a portrait of a judge: it should resemble the gods of hunting.

In fact, Titorelli is an expert whose information educates Josef K about his case as much as possible – it is certainly not much. His information is too general. Finally, when K leaves the painter’s small, dusty, and hot room he notices that the attic, like all attics, holds offices of the law. Hence the law is omnipresent physically and ideally. However, at this point, when he has received all the information about the law that he is going to get, the reader cannot have any ideas of what the law is. It organizes guilt and punishment but we know nothing of what these terms mean. Josef K understands he is facing his destiny that is nothing less than threatening. But one should realize this: we have at this stage no information on punishment. Punishment is not mentioned once during the course of the narrative. It looks like a taboo subject which will come but which cannot be mentioned.

The Priest in the Cathedral (Kafka 2009b: Ch. 9): This section includes the famous sub-narrative about the old man at the gates of the law. I do not want to discuss it because of its inherent problems, for instance, its deliberately nonsensical moral considerations concerning the justification of the guard’s action. As I see it, the parable is deliberately meaningless because its main purpose is to show Josef K that to understand the law and, *a fortiori*, his own position is beyond him. The story finally convinces him that his case is hopeless in the sense that he cannot understand it *de dicto*. What is important here is that Josef K visits the cathedral where a priest, who of course belongs to the law, says he called for him and obviously expected him, although Josef K came there to entertain a business acquaintance. Anyway, the priest meets Josef K, they relate well, and he really listens to the priest. The text waxes lyrical over its rich, subsiding metaphors, as if to make room for the horrors that will ensue,

They continued to walk up and down in silence for a while. K stuck close to the priest, not knowing where he was in the dark. The lamp he was holding had long since gone out. Once the silver statue of a saint glinted in front of him, but it was only the gleam of the silver and immediately faded back into darkness. In order not to be completely dependent on the priest, K asked him, “Aren’t we close to the main entrance now?” “No,” said the priest, ‘we’re a long way away from it’” (Kafka 2009b: 159).

The kingpin metaphor here is the door. It tells us that Josef K is far from the truth about his case. The door has two metaphoric meanings here. The first is related to redemption and forgiveness that Josef K hopes to

gain via truth. The door opens from darkness (unknowability) to light (knowledge). He needs a door to get out of his dark situation. The second one is Kafka's own special trope of the door of the law, which refers to the famous allegory of the law, the door, and its guardian told by the priest in the cathedral. As I see it, it is one of Kafka's special allegories that allow for no interpretation. It is a riddle that not even Oedipus could have solved.

What he says makes Josef K understand *de re* that he is doomed. He has no hope, his attempts to write a letter of appeal will go nowhere, and all his efforts to clear his reputation will be in vain; for instance, he has relied on women whom he thinks have considerable power – what a mistake! The priest's final attitude is like a blessing and his words as beautifully benign as they are prophetic. Now, finally, Josef K stops travelling. The end is near,

[H]is immediate return to the bank was not as necessary as he had made out, he could well afford to stay there longer. "That means I belong to the court," said the priest, "so why should I want anything from you? The court does not want anything from you. It receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go" (Kafka 2009b: 160).

What a wonderful development this is: when the narrative begins the bailiffs certainly wanted something about Josef K but now, in the end, all is said and done and the court no longer wants anything from him. But again, what is the meaning of these final words, "It [...] dismisses you when you go"? They crystallize all the ambiguities of the text that is ambiguous to the core. In such a context, no desire to be free makes sense. Perhaps this implies that he is now sentenced and doomed but it is impossible to say; we are left stranded along with this crucial ambiguity. Resignating, Josef K asks, are we near the door, alone I cannot find the door? We are not near, says the priest. That is true, they are far from the door of the law that Josef K cannot find unassisted in the dark church – but it no longer matters. The priest's last words are, we dismiss you when you leave. After this Josef K leaves, first the church and then his life when he is brutally knifed to death by his legal executioners.

These three episodes lead Josef K step by step from his self-confident rage to self-doubt and finally to the acceptance of his fate. He now has stopped traveling, he no longer visits and this is the end. Indeed, it helps him, it enables him to adjust to his personal situation and fate. The key is that his situation is incomprehensible and cannot be understood, if you do not belong to the law. Therefore, his problem is that he does not belong where all others do – they belong to the law. In the end, he is left alone as an other. Taken together, these three key episodes show how Josef K

learns to accept the basic and fatal irony in his life, namely, that he is guilty although this word does not make sense here. The key ambiguity is not between guilty and not guilty; it is between the *de dicto* comprehension and non-comprehension of the problem of guilt. Josef K arrives at a kind of solution, which is resignation and felt indifference. The priest says that the law is totally indifferent to his case and, so, this is what he feels, too. The solution to the metaphysical ambiguity at this time is indifference learned through mimesis: they do not care, therefore I do not care. How could I care, if they do not? When his executioners come, he still does not care.

No oscillations of meaning, no travelling to visit, nor exchange of words is required in his state of apathy, resignation, and indifference. No language, no linguistic tropes, nothing can extend that far into one's metaphysical constitution and condition. In this way, the narrative collapses into equivocation (language), meaninglessness (metaphysics), resignation (attitude), and total indifference (valuation). Accordingly, Josef K gets killed like a dog – “like a dog,” this is what Josef K said to himself. The only glimmer of hope amongst all this is provided by the little light in a distant window and, paradoxically, Josef K's shame, the final trope of the text. In *The Castle*, Amalia's shame is many ways different from that of Josef K but both end up in a situation where shame is their last possession. Amalia is socially dead while Josef K is dead. In the end, we have the metaphor and metonymy of death side by side, which now emphasizes the equally real nature of both. The truth is that they will no longer be recognized as persons. Nobody will come and meet them. Perhaps Amalia's social death is a parallel expression of K's destiny in the village, a kind of surrogate fate?

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