THE PERFORMANCE OF PERVERSION IN KAFKA'S LITERATURE AND ITS ADAPTATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Kafka's life and literature are dominated by the contraposition of social standards and perversions that express themselves through constant performances. The first recorded relationship between Kafka and the performing arts dates back to his childhood, when the writer, the oldest of his siblings and already passionate about writing, wrote plays for family gatherings, so that his three sisters could play in them. Kafka felt uncomfortable playing in his works and even as an adult he avoided as much as possible public readings and considered reading aloud to his sisters as a vanity. At the same time, he treated most of the readings he gave as performances in which he had to be at his best, and as opportunities to shine in the eyes of those he cared for. In a diary entry of the 25th February 1912, he expresses disappointment in the absence of his parents during his opening speech at a night in honour of Yiddish art. These performances were mostly speeches and readings of his stories, and there is no record of the plays he wrote for his sisters. After that, Kafka never wrote for the theatre any longer, with the sole exception the unfinished short piece *The Warden of the Tomb*. Nonetheless, Kafka wrote extensively in his diaries and letters about his passion for theatre and his relationship with cinema, an art that fascinated and frightened him at the same time. He commented upon the plays he saw, he cried at movies and reviewed actors' performances and their mis-casting in his diary. His narrative style is also highly visual, with descriptions akin to directorial notes and, as Claude Gandelman observes,[1] cinematographic techniques that focus the reader's attention on people, acts and details. The performance arts have not ignored the Czech author: from theatre to cinema, dance and music, countless performances have been inspired by Kafka's writings.

Kafka's passion for performance and simultaneous reluctance to perform situates him from a young age in the liminal position that he will occupy for the rest of his life: conscious of not belonging properly to any social group, but willing to be part of them, Kafka observes society from a distance. While describing a world he does not feel part of and unveiling the details of the social order of that world, Kafka displays the dark, obsessively pointless and suffocating atmospheres that characterize his fiction. In his insect form, Gregor Samsa studies the evolution of his family into integrated members of society and realizes that he is becoming an outsider. He has become a perversion of what he was — a human, a son, a brother — who still feels he is all those things but he can no longer fulfil his family's expectations in those roles. Perversions of reality are the key to understanding Kafka's use of performances. Kafka's literature demonstrates through its performances of perversion that the "standard" and "perverted" roles are just two perspectives to describe the same reality and there is no judgment in either; those who belong to a "standard" are just using performative acts granting them the status of "non-perverted" in the eyes of an audience. In Kafka's, the audience metaphorically (and literally, through the machine of *In the Penal Colony*) inscribes the character's body with the status of perverted, like a scarlet letter that shames and isolates for every sin and not only adultery.

Stanley Corngold titled one of his books after one of Kafka's most famous fictional stories, *The Metamorphosis*, and defined it "a commentator's despair". It is easy to understand where the desperation comes from: the plethora of recurring subjects in Kafka's poetics and their possible interpretations leave every commentator with the feeling of missing something, frustrated because it is impossible to eviscerate every aspect of a narrative that describes the inner and outer world of a person full of contradictions so lucidly. The common thread linking Kafka's

[1] Claude Gandelman, "Kafka as an expressionist Draftsman," *Neohelicon* 3-4 (1974): 237-277.

works with each other and that originates the despair, the "something" that can never be fully described, can only be understood by stopping to look at Kafka's narrative and looking from his perspective as a constant spectator.

Kafka lived during significant cultural changes that challenged previously accepted norms: women's emancipation movements opened voting, working rights and universities to women in different parts of the world. The research of Magnus Hirschfeld, sexologist, and Sigmund Freud, considered the father of psychoanalysis, who explicitly theorized perversion, revolutionized the understanding of sexuality and opened the door to the concept of gender by describing different sexual behaviours and acknowledging homosexuality as an identity, or even potentially a third gender. Masculinist movements, too, proliferated to oppose the rise in the status of women. Zionism became an important idea in the context of the place of Jews in European countries. Although Kafka was not specifically interested in all of these changes, his works encompass the concept of social change itself, the idea of marginal or oppressed identities that become conscious and explicit and look for their place in society. The definitions of normality and perversion were being challenged in multiple ways in Kafka's lifetime, something that is apparent in Kafka's literary representations of perversion.

Perversion is a term I use here to describes a significant deviation from a social norm that shocks the observer but can also fascinate them. The machine *In the Penal Colony*, the insect of *The Metamorphosis*, the hybrid of *A Crossbreed* and Odradek, the creature of *The Cares of a Family Man*, to name just a few, are described with fascination and horror at the same time. When confronted with a perversion the reader is compelled to interrogate the norm from which it departs. Kafka's narrative posits the norm as something which must be constantly performed. According to this logic, everyone perceives the standards of their own group as the norm and the "other" a perversion. There is nothing that makes standards correct *per se*, but every standard becomes correct when it has been performed often enough. The nobles of the short story *The Problem with Our Laws* take decisions based on the law, but ignore its origin and proper application. Like every major artist, Kafka's fiction exists not only in his fictional universe, but speaks to his contemporary social conditions, with implications as well for following generations.

As well as Kafka's literature, I am looking at film and theatre adaptations because they contribute to the scholarship through the direct representation of Kafka's performances. In my opinion, the specific adaptations I discuss in chapters four and five contribute to the understanding of the performative nature of perversion in Kafka. These adaptations span from the literally faithful to the portrayal of the director's personal view of social topics through Kafka's theme, thus showing how the role of perverted performances expands beyond Kafka's social environment. This thesis is divided into five chapters that explore different aspects of the perversion of society from Kafka's liminal point of view. The first chapter defines the terms "perversion" and "performance", describing the methodology used in this thesis and giving an overview of the main primary and secondary literature used in this thesis. The second chapter looks at Kafka's biography as a factor in his literary output and relates it to perversion and performativity. In the chapter I also expand on Kafka's perception of standards and his narrative of the outsider as an "innocent" spectator of the performance of perversion.

From the third to the last chapter, the attention focuses on different, specific perversions: in the third chapter I discuss the perversion of gender. I question the assumption of critics like Robin West and Corngold, who comment on Kafka as if he was working with binary gender and sexuality: either male or female and either heterosexual or homosexual (the latter barely mentioned at all). This chapter expands on the conversation about gender and sexuality in Kafka's stories, which is relatively recent: Elizabeth Boa and Dagmar Lorenz suggest that gender ideologies of the early twentieth century and the rising conversation about the heterosexual model

affected Kafka's literature.[2] Both authors show how some of the behaviours portrayed by Kafka are explicitly masculine or feminine and therefore can be assigned to one sex or another as a representation of their gender. Given that all of these behaviours are perceived as masculine or feminine, but are not exclusive to either biological sex, I side with Judith Butler in suggesting that gender is a social construct that is enacted via a performance. Kafka perverts this performance by portraying his main character as a new, third gender.

From gender, which affects individuals, I move to the fourth chapter and the perversion of humanity, which affects humans as a species. In this chapter I analyse the several impersonations and behaviours of and by non-human animals in Kafka's stories. Kafka renders the intuitive line separating humans and animals as thin as that separating men and women. In the same fashion described in the previous chapter, I assert that this separation comes mostly from performance and expectations of the audience. Animals and humans are compared directly in *Jackals and Arabs*, a short story in which talking jackals try to convince a traveller (an external, innocent observer) to kill a group of Arabs, who, at the end of the story, get rid of the animals, showing their superficiality and cowardice. The two groups are in a war of equals: in Kafka's fiction animals can perform as humans and humans can perform as animals in what I define as a racial drag that shows the fragility of the performance of standards. Animals are often referred to as wild, unregulated, metaphors of the most basic instinct of humanity, including sexuality and gender, a theme that I touch upon again in this chapter through a discussion of two theatre adaptations of the same text, *A Report to an Academy*. Through a visual performance, the subtext of the journey from an ungendered to a male individual is particularly effective, as shown by different directors and performers who display it before any literary critic has discussed it. Repetition of acts, imitation and performative expectations play a substantial role in the journey and they also happen to be key elements in performance art and in the establishment of standards that regulate perversions.

In the last chapter I look at the way in which standards are created and regulated through the Law. In this chapter I refer to Law, like Posner and most of the other legal commentators of Kafka, as an all-encompassing system of unspecified and unspecifiable origin. I argue that its perversion influences all of Kafka's stories, even those that are not related to the Law; the Law is ultimately the mechanism that allows the establishment of standards defied by perversions. Like every legal system, Kafka's Law relies heavily on performances to establish and consolidate its power over the dominated, who are the audience of the power. The performativity of the law allows a change of status, as from innocent to suspected and guilty or, more relevant in Kafka's narrative, from free to imprisoned. As a lawyer, Kafka understands the law, but as a literary "expert on power", as Elias Canetti calls him in his *Kafka's Other Trial*, he also sees how the system is created to control and can only be perpetrated through punishment, thus bringing about a perversion of justice. The chapter and the work end with the analysis of two film adaptations of *The Trial*.

Previous critics have focused on specific aspects of the narrative or specific texts, and for the most part this thesis does not challenge their conclusions, even acknowledging that some of them, although contrasting, can be valid at the same time. This can only be possible if we do not focus on specific metaphors and allegories, but we acknowledge what connects every text of Kafka's production: we need to stand next to him among the insects, the monkeys, the dogs, the condemned innocents and all those who are considered perverts by the performers staging normality. If we do so, Kafka's narrative will open its doors to animal, gender and performance

[2] The main works that will be mostly used here are Stanley Corngold, *The Commentator's Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka's 'Metamorphosis'* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1973), Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, "Kafka and Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. Julian Preece (Cambridge UP, 2002), 169-188 and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).

studies, to name but a few. In a 2007 installation, artist Jorge Méndez Blake placed a copy of the novel *The Castle* under a brick wall, disrupting the whole structure. His message may have been open to art and literature, but his choice of artist could not have been more appropriate: Kafka's literature breaks the expected flow of social standards like the lines formed by the bricks and eventually affects the performance of something common, expected, taken for granted, like a wall, jeopardizing its stability. The productive perversion of a performative space makes the audience question whether the wall is even necessary.

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The approach to Kafka's literature can be challenging, given how much has been written in the almost one hundred years from his death. His literature has been interpreted from different perspectives and often given contradictory explanations that can nonetheless co-exist thanks to a style that Corngold summed up in the title of his book *The Commentator's Despair* (1971); Kafka's prose is rich in symbols, allegories, metaphors and references, both conscious and unconscious. Because Kafka's symbols and metaphors always beg one more explanation given that "no single reading of Kafka escapes blindness",[3] I am more interested in focusing on the reasons behind the difficulty of interpretation itself. I look for the threads linking Kafka's stories with each other and use them as possible models for further analysis. The primary link is the perversion ruling Kafka's worlds. When used according to the definition I'll provide below, the term "perversion" offers new literary readings and opens up further research into Kafka's literature. The first perversion is on an individual level: gender. As one of the defining characteristics of every human being, its performance follows standards of behaviour and expectations from the assignation of sex at birth. The second perversion affects humans as a species. The performance of humanity follows the standard imposed on and for humans by humans, in the attempt to define a precise line between us and other species. The last perversion I focus on is the perversion of Law, intended as the system through which humans formally regulate themselves and establish their standards. In Kafka's writings, this system becomes an inescapable, invisible and independent machine regulating every aspect of every life.

The second aspect I focus on is the role played by performance. Kafka's stories are very visual, describe performances and performative acts and perversions are some of them. Kafka's stories are narrated in a detached style that goes beyond judgment of facts and characters by describing events and their perversion. In Kafka's literature there are no questions or explanations about the perversions, because there is no space for the narrator's opinion and the reader is faced with descriptions of events that follow logically, albeit in a perverted logic. This factual representation of events can be considered "wrong" from the observer's perspective, but it remains a logical and factual description of facts in the narration's context, asking readers to consider their own reasons for what they consider "normal". Kafka is only showing performances and every event is a perversion only if those who claim to hold the non-perverted perspective make it one. Given the visual style, theatre and film adaptations of Kafka's stories allow the display of the performance of perversion to an audience perceiving itself as non-perverted.

In the remainder of this chapter, after a description of my methodological approach, I describe the themes and main sources used in each chapter. Here, I also define the specific use I make of the main terms connecting every chapter: perversion and performance.

METHODOLOGY

Kafka's secondary literature is vast and comprehensive, but there are gaps in scholarship contrasting with the abundance of sources discussing topics like Kafka's relationship with his father, his possible mental illness and relationship with psychoanalysis, the treatment on women in his stories and, above all, the sources of inspiration for his stories. This thesis shows how perversions and performance are dominant threads characterizing Kafka's style and connecting

[3] S. Corngold, *The Commentator's Despair*, V.

his works on various themes. In this thesis I use Kafka's primary literature (stories, novels, but also letters and fragments), secondary literature and adaptations of Kafka's work for theatre and cinema. The reason for the selection of these sources is discussed below.

The selected primary texts display what I consider to be some of the best examples of perversions of gender, humanity and Law. There are also several autobiographical sources that best indicate, through a psychoanalytical approach, the view of reality held by Kafka. In fact, although they are mostly used in the second chapter, I have used the *Diaries* and *Letters* as sources of primary literature, in line with Walter Müller-Seidel's observation[4] that Kafka uses in his letter to his father, and by extension in the letters and diaries, the same style and many of the same topics he uses in his fictional literature. In some passages of the diaries it is even possible to find incipits or fragments of new stories. I list in each of the following sections which stories have been mostly used in each chapter and I give a brief synopsis of each. I have used the primary sources in their English translation to facilitate accessibility to an international audience. Furthermore, the main points of this thesis are clarified mostly by plots and events. However, there are a few instances in which the understanding of specific words and expressions in the original is needed and in these circumstances I use the original German.

The secondary literature on Kafka is impressive; there is a huge amount of articles, books and references written about Kafka, gender, animality and Law. I restricted the options to those works that provide a perspective of the peculiarity of each of these topics in Kafka's literature. What seemed to be missing was a line connecting the three through the overarching topic of the perceived perversion of reality. In fact, every critical source discussing Kafka's perversion was mostly discussing some kinds of sexual perversions or even, as I will describe in the next section, perversions limited to the sexual sphere. However, Kafka's perversion goes beyond the explicitly or strictly sexual, nor it suggests any pathological behaviour, but rather a genuine different approach to reality. To expand the context, my theoretical framework for perversion uses texts providing a discourse about perversions as a behaviour and definitions of that behaviour and I show how this can be adapted to Kafka's use of perversion. In the same way, the conversation about gender, animality and Law starts from definitions of aspects of these topics and then shows how they are used by Kafka. As I will show throughout the thesis, perverted and performative aspects can be applied to all of these themes when observed in Kafka's work. As mentioned above, the sources discussing Kafka's use of performance are not as abundant as those discussing the narrative of specific works or approaches to Kafka's interpretation. Therefore, with this thesis I provide a larger view of this underestimated, but in my opinion fundamental, aspect of the narrative.

Finally, I use recordings and direct observation of performances adapted from, or inspired by, Kafka's works. These include mainly films and theatre adaptations, but I also briefly mention other performances. In addition to the observation and analysis, I also produced and staged an adaptation of one of Kafka's works, *A Report to the Academy*, during the Melbourne Fringe Festival 2016 and the Adelaide Fringe Festival 2017. The reason why I added performance observation and experience to a literary analysis is dual. Firstly, I wanted to show the potential in performance contained in the story. Secondly, the adaptations give practical examples and case studies for the performative value of the perversions contained in Kafka's works. Even before the literary academic conversation showed their performative potential, visual artists had already understood Kafka as an ideal source for performances. It can be argued that the embodiment and representation of Kafka's stories has not reached its full potential, yet, but how this can be done will be left to further research.

I analysed primary literature and performances from a post-structuralist perspective. A binary approach, typical of the structuralist analysis, is outdated, and it would have been a

[4] Walter Müller-Seidel, "Franz Kafkas Brief an den Vater: Ein Literarischer Text der Moderne," *Orbis Litterarum* 42, no.2 (1987): 353-374.

disservice to Kafka, particularly in the perspective taken in this thesis: Kafka, I argue, shows through perversions and performance the absurdity of adhering to a set of standards, to a mentality of "x and non-x". It would have been paradoxical to approach his works using a similar discourse. Furthermore, as Graham Allen summarizes when emphasizing the focus on indeterminacy typical of post-structuralism, "criticism, like literature itself, is inherently unstable, the product of subjective desires and drives".[5] Such an approach is particularly effective with Kafka, because his stories repeatedly play with indeterminacy. The perversion of the fields studied in this thesis is strictly connected to the indeterminate nature that characterizes post-structuralism. Nonetheless, a structuralist binary is useful only as a general starting point of the perverted/non-perverted reality and situations (if we describe everything that functions according to our standards as "non-perverted", as I mention below) portrayed in the works. After this initial differentiation has been established, often at the beginning of the story, I analyse elements of the plots and how they combine with the socio-cultural context that gave Kafka the "standards" that are being performed and perverted.

Up to this point I have assumed an instinctive understanding of terms like "perversion" and "performance", but it is important not to misunderstand how these terms will be used in this thesis. Kafka's worlds are realistic and similar to ours, but at the same time the most perverted events happen as if they were normal, everyday occurrences. Perversions perform and therefore these two key words demand a definition.

WHAT ARE PERVERSIONS?

Before discussing the perversion of gender and its performance, it is first useful to clarify what is here meant by the term "perversion". Although the term is now more commonly used as an indicator of sexual behaviour, I suggest going back to an earlier meaning identifying a way of thinking[6] and its associated behaviours, with full acknowledgment that sexual implications are subconsciously possible in every form of perversion.

Broadly speaking, perversions are phenomena and events that are illogical, unexpected or unreal in nature and have a performative effect. Hegel used the term *Verkehrung* to define "the new topsy-turvy world of Enlightenment culture",[7] the destabilisation of his perception of a system, with no reference to sex and sexuality. The reference to the Enlightenment culture, something new in his time, but that our society considers accepted if not even outdated, shows the importance to provide a context to perversion before defining something as such. The word "perversion" indicates something that has deviated from whatever it is logically connected to, while still being an expression of it.[8] According to Foucault, perverts only exist because controlling powers create standards and, by consequence, perversions that need to be controlled:

> "Through the various discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness; from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized; around the least fantasies, moralists, but especially doctors, brandished the whole emphatic vocabulary of abomination.".[9]

Arnold Goldberg identifies three key elements in every perversion: everything starts from a structural failure leading to sexualisation (i.e. the cause of the preference of a perversion), which

[5] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.

[6] Serge Andre, *l'Imposteur Perverse* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 170.

[7] James Penney, *The world of perversion: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Absolute of Desire* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 104.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1990), 36.

brings to the split between perverted and non-perverted behaviour and culminates in a person's individual dynamics leading to the perverted status that characterizes them.[10] Although Goldberg was referring to sexual perversions, I suggest that it is possible to identify the same elements in Kafka's various perversions. The structural failure happens when the character departs from established standards by refusing his socially imposed role, his sexuality or his religion. Perversions are usually initiated in Kafka's stories by an unconscious behaviour of the main character, that represents the structural failure. The split is revealed in the act that separates accepted norms from perversions and can be an arrest (*The Trial*), a transformation (*The Metamorphosis*) or any other explicit manifestation of the distance from the standard. Finally, the individual dynamics are the specific behaviour of each character before and after the split that eventually lead to the story's conclusion.

Kafka's perversions are situations in which events defy a system accepted by the readers (the audience) and known to the characters of the story. The standards can be based on logic, but also on common sense and, even more often, simply accepted practice. Popularly, the term is used in a derogatory way to define unacceptable, threatening practices, both sexual and non-sexual, while medically, particularly in the early days of its study, as pathologies that deviate from expected sexual approaches. In this thesis I use the term without any moral content and at the same time I think it remains the best term, because of its historical usage addressed to the outsiders marginalized by society. Kafka was fascinated by those who behave differently from the standard, and made them heroes of his stories, therefore in my analysis there is no pejorative implication in the term, but simply an indication of the response to events and behaviours in the socio-cultural perspective Kafka was part of. Those who are involved in the perversion are then given a chance to subjugate themselves again to the system, or, if the perversion is perceived as such by them but not by a higher power, to submit to the new standards. Examples of the latter situation are the main character of *A Report to an Academy*, a monkey who is forced to accept the standard of human nature he had never known and become a human himself, and Josef K., who in *The Trial* dies for being unable to accept new standards of a Law he thought he knew. Sexual perversions occasionally appear in Kafka's narrative, even if they are not particularly explicit without reading between the lines. However, most of the perversions I discuss are non-sexual. Nonetheless, the study of sexual perversions still gives a useful perspective about their role in Kafka's literature. After all, sexualisation is an attempt to connect with a prior non-perverted situation,[11] as some of Kafka's characters show by displaying sexual, albeit mechanical and superficial, behaviours after the perverted situation has been initiated. According to Freud and his followers, perversions are "Sexual activities which either (*a*) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (*b*) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim".[12] This definition escapes the possibility of finding a universal application: not only does it presuppose the presence of a design for some body parts, but it also suggests that there is a "final sexual aim", a teleology of sexuality. Intuitively, every reader understands what it is meant: the sexual parts are the genitals and the sexual aim is reproduction. However, and I'll discuss this briefly in the section dedicated to gender studies, nothing suggests these to be the "correct" use of the words or that any path that deviates from them is "wrong". According to Freud, the role of perversion is to save the person from neurosis and thus it is a sort of defence mechanism that should be embraced for one's own sake rather than closeted. The quote above suggests that everything related to the healthy enjoyment of sexual acts, like foreplay, is a perversion. In some sense, Freud acknowledges this contradiction, admitting that

[10] Arnold Goldberg, *The Problem of Perversion* (Yale UP, 1995), 54.
[11] Ibid., 56.
[12] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 16.

> Everyday experience has shown that most of these extensions [...] are constituents which are rarely absent from the sexual life of healthy people [...] No healthy person, it appears, can fail to make some addition that might be called perverse to the normal sexual aim.[13]

Elsewhere in the same essay, Freud maintains, in a similar context that the sexual life of most people contains abnormal elements. The German term *abnorm* is parallel to the term *Verkehrung*, the same word used by Hegel, indicating something that goes against the norm, but that at the same time is not pathological, in accordance to the meaning I am using in this thesis. Under this definition, homosexual sex is also a perversion, as it does not make use of the regions of the body designed for heterosexual union and it has nothing to do with the sexual aim of reproduction. To explain the normality of perversions, including homosexuality, Freud clarifies that they are "substitute(s) for impulses the source of whose strength is derived from the sexual instinct".[14] For neurotics, perversions are unconscious forces that dominate both the sexual and the behavioural field, with some exceptions: every behaviourally abnormal person, according to Freud, is sexually abnormal, but not every sexually abnormal person is behaviourally abnormal. As Kafka's characters show, perversion can be hidden behind a socially acceptable façade. At the end of the *Essays* even Freud admits that there is no reason to try and describe normality as a set of specific behaviours, because "perversions" and "inversions" (two terms I discuss more extensively in the third chapter) are part of normality themselves. Because of this, the use of "perversion" that I will be making throughout this thesis is linked to what would be considered normal in a specific social setting and acts outside of these boundaries. In other words, I am not claiming that what is considered perverted now will be, or has been, considered perverted always and everywhere. There are situations that defy physical and biological events that can only be considered perversions of reality, but other manifestations of perversions, like the gender attributes assigned to one sex, are more specific to Kafka's socio-cultural setting.

The perception of the self as a part of the world is determined by socially accepted standards, but this vision is only apparently fixed. Through methods such as psychoanalysis, it is possible to show the existence of a multitude of perceptions and selves, some of which engage in activities that pervert the standards that shaped the self.[15] Perversions are one possible enactment of subconscious fantasies that are refused by the perceived self, while creative processes are a way to give a voice to the other selves in a regulated and acceptable manner. This is exemplified by many artists, who create perverted alter-egos to engage with those selves that cannot be portrayed in society in order to better understand themselves.[16] Kafka is not an exception: his characters' perversions are a reflection of his forbidden selves, who manage to be different, even if they are punished for it. His autobiographically intimate style, full of images and symbols is not significantly different between fiction and personal letters. In agreement with Lacan's view of the perverted individual's behaviour,[17] according to which the perverted individual acknowledges the necessity to be punished, the Other created by Kafka is an expression of his desire to pervert standards. However, the alter-ego pays the consequences of perverted wishes and desires because he acts against the imposed standards.

Judith Butler suggests that what has the power to "produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" [18] is performative, therefore every performance of perversion is performative, too. In fact, every time we recognize something as perversion, we are also

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[13] Ibid., 26.
[14] Ibid., 30.
[15] Goldberg, *The Problem of Perversion*, 48.
[16] Joyce McDougall, *Plea for a Measure of Abnormality* (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 210.
[17] Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977).
[18] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

reinforcing the idea of "normality" that that something is going against. What is normal is taken for granted, unnoticed, but the perverted act reminds its audience that there is a "normality" and provokes a reaction of some kind. The evidence of this reaction is given by the fact that the term "perversion" is usually used in a negative connotation. The perverted phenomenon is seen as an exception of a standard and this constitutes the starting point of what we consider a performance.

THE WORLD THEATRE: PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMATIVITY

The complexity in the definition of a performance comes from the different types of performances we can observe. For many years it has been acknowledged that there is no specific form in which performances exist, as we need to "transcend such conventional dichotomies as oral and written, public and private, doing and thinking, primitive and modern, sacred and secular",[19] because performances can come in innumerable shapes and "performance art has opened hitherto unnoticed spaces".[20]

The most intuitive performance sees someone playing a part based on some form of script and rehearsals, while an audience suspends their disbelief. However, there are different kinds of performances and not all of them are as immediate. Erving Goffman uses the term "performance" to refer "to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers".[21] The definition is comprehensive and compatible with all of the elements listed by Elizabeth Bell in her compendium of elements of the performance according to theorists of performance, the most common of which are audience and performer.[22] We can talk about a form of restored behaviour, because, in this context, performances are actions consciously different from those of the person performing them.

However, not every performance needs to be voluntary or structured in the same pattern. Anthropology and sociology prove that social interactions work on and are affected by patterns and routines. This questions the need of a performance to start from the voluntary action of studying the script, rehearse and enter a performative space where observers can witness a re-enactment of reality. After defining the term "performance", Goffman makes the example of professionals who perform their job for an audience of non-professionals and this often requires them to repeat some acts or add something t their job, just to put the customer's mind to peace. These professionals do not perform in performative spaces, but need to perform and re-enact real behaviours for a performative role. I find it interesting that, while making this point, Goffman involuntarily shows how much expectations determine performances. In his example, "anxious women motorists" ask mechanics to repeat a superfluous action to be reassured that their car is fixed. Regardless of the point he is making, to specify the sex of the motorist (a specification that does not happen in any other example he makes) shows the expectation that the anxious motorist will be a woman. According to the stereotype used by Goffman, the motorist has to be a woman, so that everyone will accept more comfortably the fact that she is anxious and asking a mechanic to do something pointless just to calm herself down. Such a behaviour is not consciously decided nor rehearsed in a conventional manner, but nonetheless it is a performance, as it has a temporary change of behaviour (the anxious behaviour that will be put to rest once the superfluous act has been accomplished), an audience that has a response (the mechanic performing the action) and a performer (the woman herself) to happen. None of these elements demands that the performer be a woman, but, thanks the social obligation and cultural

[19] John J. MacAloon, *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 1.

[20] Erik MacDonald, *Theatre at the Margins: Text and the Post-Structured Age* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1993), 175.

[21] Erving Goffman, "Performances: Belief in the Part One is Playing," in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial (New York: Routledge, 2004), 61.

[22] Elizabeth Bell, *Theories of Performance* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 30.

compliance,[23] the audience will consider the performance more believable and act upon it. Goffman indirectly acknowledges the same when he suggests that the audience is "asked to believe that the character they see actually possess the attributes he appears to possess".[24] Something similar happens when we observe Kafka's narcissistic behaviour: hidden behind a conscious façade of shyness and care, there is a need for attention, a desire to attract an audience by not eating specific foods or refusing to join the family during holiday until his father joins him. In a way, Kafka, like the motorist of the example above, behaves in a certain way to keep a character that had been given to him through education and upbringing. These performances isolate one aspect of a behaviour: the motorist is not *only* anxious and Kafka was did not *only* have narcissistic behaviours, but these are the aspects of their personalities that we observe in a specific context and recognize as performances.

All of these performances are part of what Marvin Carlson defines as the display of "a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behaviour",[25] which is opposed to performance as a display of skills that, Richard Bauman argues, requires a consciousness of doubleness: it is impossible to identify the correct display of any action without having a model of the ideal action. This kind of performance will be less relevant to my work, but it should still be pointed out that consciousness is not always needed, given that non-humans still perform. I go into the topic of the audience and the non-human gaze more in detail in chapter four, but this kind of performance cannot be labelled under the definition of voluntary. In fact, it is even hard to know for certain if non-human animals know they are reproducing someone else's behaviour or even being observed for performative purposes.

So far I have shown how a performance needs a performer and an action, or series of actions, that can be observed happening in a specific amount of time. The third element of a performance connects it with performativity: audience. Without an audience there is no set of "recognized and culturally coded pattern of behaviour" (ref), nor anyone to recognize a non-voluntary performance or, most important of all to be performative, to have an effect upon. According to Butler "to say that something is performative, it means that it produces a series of effects".[26] Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick point out how "the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes"[27] is also performative. To produce those effects, the performance needs to happen for an audience, which could also be an audience of one.

John Austin gives examples of some performative speech acts that make something happen based on a set of rules and agreements that have to be followed for a performance to be performative.[28] Among the possibilities in which an act is not performative, Austin lists actors who, during a show, perform a performative action that does not have a result, like, for example marrying two other actors on stage. According to him, not every performance is performative, but he also acknowledges this lack of performativity as hollow or void "in a *peculiar way*" (151, italics in the original), without explaining the peculiarity. Parker and Sedgwick describe this situation as a perversion made possible by the fact that "the philosophical and theatrical meanings of performative actually do establish contact with each other".[29] I argue that this perversion comes from the fact that the specific performative act does not reach the usual result (i.e. the two actors are not married to each other, in the example), but it still achieves a result in the world of the

[23] Richard Bauman and Joel Scherzer, "The Ethnography of Speaking," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 4(1975): 95-119.

[24] Goffman, "Performances", 59.

[25] Marvin A. Carlson, "What is Performance," in Bial, *Performance Studies Reader*, 70.

[26] Interview of June 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc, accessed on the 29th January 2018.

[27] Andrew Parker and Eve K. Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), IV.

[28] John L. Austin, "How to do Things with Words," in Bial, *Performance Studies Reader*, 148.

[29] Parker and Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance*, IV.

performance, as well as a different result in the world of the audience. As per the Goffman quote above, a performance needs to have an effect on the audience and is therefore performative in some way. In the example of the marriage, the plot can continue with the two characters being married, as the words have had a performative result in the staged story, and the audience is affected by that marriage. In a similar way, Kafka's performances of perversion have effects on the audience of his fictional world, but also affect the reader's world, by showing different forms of perversions in their world and conveying the modern message of the necessity to reconsider the very idea of social standards.

To conclude, the link between perversion and performance should now be clear: both are acts that can be observed for a limited time by an audience that notices them for their peculiarity or unexpected presence and have a performative effect. In the next sections I give an overview of the performance of the three kinds of perversion I focus on, as well as the literature used.

KAFKA'S LIFE: THE ORIGIN OF PERVERSION

In the next chapter I describe Kafka's life and the connection that every stage of his life had with different forms of perversions, as well as the experiences that enabled him to see the world in a perverted light. I mostly discuss how his experiences shaped his view of the world into a perverted performance, particularly in those aspects that I treat in the following chapters.

The source for the historical setting is Mikula Teich's *Bohemia in History*[30] while the main sources for Kafka's biography are Ernst Pawel's *The Nightmare of Reason*[31] and Karl Wagenbach's *Kafka,*[32] two of the most canonical and complete biographies written so far. For the analysis of Kafka's literature I start with an overview that includes Deleuze and Guattari's *Towards a Minor Literature*, the title of which refers to Kafka's own opinion about his literature. Most importantly for my research is the analysis of Kafka's literary style, which the two philosophers argue is highly influenced by his own life. Based on this, Deleuze and Guattari agree with Müller-Seidel in considering Kafka's letters and diaries as expressions of his literary concern.[33] The clearest example of this will be widely used throughout this thesis and is the *Letter to his Father*, in which Kafka breaks down several episodes of his life, mostly involving his father, with the intention of explaining to his parent why he is so afraid of him. For the psychoanalytic interpretation of Kafka's life and works I use Freud's work, but also several contemporary sources that expand or build upon it, in some cases specific to Kafka, like Arthur Scherr's observation on the maternal influences.[34]

Through Saul Friedländer's work,[35] I analyse the conflicted relationship between Kafka and sexuality, a theme so obviously complicated that Kafka admitted in his own letters to struggle with it, as it is also confirmed by most of the sexual encounters in Kafka's novels. I also suggest that this tormented relationship caused the display of sexual perversions discussed by other critics and, eventually, a broadening of the theme of perversion to other fields of reality. As Friedländer maintains, sexuality is the starting point for Kafka's literature and therefore, I argue, also of every perversion. Because of this, the framework that provides connections between Kafka's life and perversions is in the two already mentioned books *The Problem of Perversion* and *The World of Perversion*, the first of which also suggests a connection between narcissism and perversion. This further confirms that perversion is key in Kafka: Walter Sokel, among others, observed

[30] Mikula Teich, *Bohemia in History* (Cambridge UP, 1998).

[31] Ernst Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giraux, 1984).

[32] Klaus Wagenbach, *Kafka*, (London: Haus Publishing Ltd, 2003).

[33] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Franz Kafka: Towards a minor literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota UP, 1986).

[34] Arthur Scherr, "Maternal destructiveness in the life of Franz Kafka," *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 47, no.3 (1987): 262-278.

[35] Saul Friedländer, *Kafka: the Poet of Shame and Guilt* (Yale UP, 2013).

Kafka's narcissistic style by noticing how his protagonists are the only characters to be conscious that they are experiencing distorted (i.e. perverted) events.[36] *The World of Perversion* helps with the understanding of the use of perversions as a form of rebellion against the unpleasant events of life. A passive approach to life, similar to Kafka's, is described as the consequence of "actively causing the victim's splitting from itself".[37] In this case, the victims are Kafka's alter-egos, a manifestation of "the desire [...of] instrumentalizing omnipotence"[38] over the Other that is sadomasochisticaly tortured. Kafka, who, as I show in chapter two, was an outsider for his whole life and saw the perversion of his life, needs to find a cathartic release by projecting the same perversions onto his alter-egos, holding a mirror revealing "that our thoughts and actions often contain contradictory elements, rational as well as nonrational components, even when we believe we are thinking logically and acting normally".[39] Acknowledging this contradiction and making his alter-egos suffer the consequences of it, he manages to cope with a perverted life.

The last of the main sources of secondary literature is Sander Gilman's monograph *Franz Kafka: the Jewish Patient*,[40] a monograph about the Jewish social environment in which Kafka lived. Gilman discusses topics that affected Kafka's adult life, influencing his narrative and perception of self, both as an individual and as a member of Jewish society. In the chapter, I focus particularly on the stereotypical perception and treatment of the Jewish population by non-Jewish observers: their association with animals and the view of the Jewish body as sick and in need of a cure. Both of these comparisons cause an understanding of reality reflected in Kafka's literature. Here, as well as in Kafka's own hypochondria, the performance of the Jewish population is shown through a metaphorical sickness that matches social expectations. As a result, Kafka's literature often shows a stereotype of masculinity that treats strength and health (that Gilman refers to as "the soldier's body") like mandatory requirements for a successful life. Finally, in the same book Gilman talks about tuberculosis and its relationship with the Jewish body. As Kafka died of tuberculosis, I end my chapter showing how the illness affected Kafka's personal life and his narrative until the completion of his last stories before dying in a sanatorium in 1924.

In every chapter I provide examples from different short stories and novels, but will always focus on some, the synopsis of which can be found in this and the next sections. Chapter two links Kafka's biography with perversion and performance to show how these themes were present in his perception of life. The chapter mostly refers to *The Metamorphosis* and *A Hunger Artist*, but I also discuss some entries of Kafka's diary and some of the letters he sent to friends and family. These two stories show how perversion and performance are prevalent in Kafka's artistic creations throughout his life, as they were written in very different periods of Kafka's life. Both stories, like similar others, describe the point of view of individuals who are considered perverted by the audience observing them, even if from their inner perspective they are only behaving in the most appropriate and logical way based on their circumstances. These two stories also exemplify a concept that I expand in the chapter: explicit and implicit performances.

The Metamorphosis was written only a few years after Kafka started working in an office while still living with his family. When compared to the previous stories, in *The Metamorphosis*, we find a more comprehensive and mature description of some of the elements that will define Kafka's autobiographic style in the future. The transformation into an animal seen as the liberation from work mirrors Kafka's hatred for a his work routine limiting the hours he can dedicate to artistic expression. The troubled relationship with the family is similar to Kafka's own

[36] Walter H. Sokel, "Frozen Sea and River of Narration: The Poetics Behind Kafka's 'Break-Through'," *New Literary History*, 17, no.2 (1986): 351-363.

[37] J. Penney, *Perversion*, 21.

[38] Ibid., 178.

[39] Reza Banakar, "In Search of Heimat: A Note on Franz Kafka's Concept of Law," *Law and Literature* 22, no.3 (2010): 463-490.

[40] Sander Gilman, *Franz Kafka: the Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

affection for his mother and sisters and fear of the father, who, in the story, kills his son. Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman who lives with his parents and sister, one day wakes up from a disturbing dream having transformed into a bug. His first concern is to hide the situation from his family and his boss who has come to check why he is late for work. Apologetic and worried for his job, the sole source of income in the family, Gregor clumsily leaves his room, but his new appearance causes terror in everyone and is violently sent back to his room by a terrorized but aggressive father. In the following days, Gregor learns how to use his new body in the confined space of his room while his family lives in the rest of the house. He is fed regularly with scraps and rotten food, his new diet, by his sister Greta, the only one who can stand the sight of the brother's new form. Although Gregor seems to be adapting to his new life, his family is forced to find new sources of income. Everyone finds a job and, the more time they spend without Gregor, the closer they come to each other. In an attempt to be again part of the family in moments of intimacy, Gregor leaves his room twice more and both times he is sent back into the room. The first time his father starts throwing apples at him, until one of them gets stuck in his carapax and starts rotting. The second and last time, Gregor leaves his room lured by the violin music his sister is playing for the family's tenants. Everyone is scared by him and for the first time Greta, who had already expressed passive frustration towards her brother by not feeding him regularly, complains about him and suggests sending him away, doubting the fact that he even is Gregor. Humiliated and feeling rejected by the family who is now emotionally rather than physically aggressive to him, Gregor retreats into his room, where he will let himself die slowly by starvation. The story ends with his body thrown away like garbage and the family celebrating their liberation by enjoying a walk around the city and going back to a normal life.

Starvation and death are themes in common with the second story, *A Hunger Artist*. At this point in life, Kafka had already started living as a vegetarian, an uncommon choice in his social environment, and his diaries and letter show a troubled relationship with food. In this story, Kafka's alter-ego is a performer who starves himself for forty days inside of a cage before being released and fed in front of a stunned audience. The artist loves his art, as well as the people controlling him, because they can voucher for his artistic perfection; the hunger artist even becomes annoyed when the guards pretend not to be checking on him, just to allow him to sneak in some food. At the end of the forty days, the artist is forced to eat against his will, but his anger is explained by his agent as a symptom of excessive hunger, thus normalizing with the use of a standard (the fact that normally people feel better when eating) the perversion of reality (the artist's preference for fasting). With the interest of the audience constantly decreasing, everyone forgets about the artist, who is left in his cage until the last moments of his life, when he is found among some pieces of straw in his cage. In his last words to one of the attendants, he explains he should not be admired by the audience, because the only reason why he was not eating was because he did not like the food. After his death, his cage is occupied by a lively panther that causes awe and excited fascination in the audience, opposed to the contemplatory observation characterizing the artist's performance.

Kafka's biography reveals that Kafka uses perversions as a way to express the possibility of different perspectives of reality that did not necessarily match the social standards of his day. In line with Rosi Braidotti's idea of the "nomad",[41] I suggest that Kafka is indirectly showing that categories are limiting and only serve the purpose to oppress those who do not fit in them. According to the author, the "nomad" is a modern subject in flux, one who does not oppose hierarchy, but at the same time is constantly an "other", always becoming and always engaged in dynamic power relations. This theory enables one "to think about and beyond well-known categories such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and so on, without being confined and limited

[41] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994).

by those categories".[42] Every perversion can only be considered in a negative light by those who are restricted in their view of standards. These individuals support, directly or indirectly, the capital punishment of perversions and are opposed to Kafka's alter-egos whose existence and humanity is a statement against the injustice of standards.

THE PERVERSION OF GENDER

In the third chapter I discuss the representation of gender and its perversion in Kafka's narrative. This kind of perversion is, among those I observe in this thesis, the most dependent on culturally determined social standards that are not necessarily relatable to the reader's perspective. In fact, if the perversions of humanity and Law made by Kafka consist of clear perversions of logic, reality and contemporary standards, the perversion of gender requires an understanding of Kafka's perspective on performance and its connection with gender and sexuality.

The framework for the understanding of gender as a social construct is provided by the always increasing literature in gender studies, a discipline that started with Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 *The Second Sex*[43] and that then gained further momentum thanks to Gayle Rubin in the 1970's.[44] The basic terminology and key points are derived from *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies*[45] and a historical background is provided mainly by Laqueur's *Making Sex*.[46] The latter book is a historical and sociological description of the evolution of the understanding of sex and gender before the two started being considered as distinct concepts and shows the path from the Aristotelian vision of one sex displayed in different forms to the concept of gender as a social construct. Particularly relevant for my work is Judith Butler's view of gender as a performance that is enforced every time a child is born by attributing them a role based on their biological sex.[47] In her works, Butler shows how gender is regulated in different ways: both as a tradition perpetrated by society in a repeated behaviour that lost its origin in time and in actual, written regulations that determine the behaviour of people based on their sex and sexuality in the legal, military and educational field, among others.[48] Butler bases this part of her analysis and observation on the same theory expressed in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, which I also discuss, in which the author insists on the effect of institutionalized power to create categories of sexuality and gender with the sole intent of regulating and punishing them in order to later establish control over social behaviour. In the chapter I cite mainly two critics as examples of the consequences Butler has had for gender studies. One of them, Lynne Segal, criticizes Butler's effect on the concept of identity,[49] while the other, Martha Nussbaum who is also generally critical of Butler's work, admits there is a prejudicetowards bodies as gendered individuals even in scientific research .[50]

In Kafka's social environment, heterosexuality was considered the standard and sexologists like Hirschfeld and Westphal were only starting to articulate new concepts of sexuality that could eventually determine identity. Freud[51] describes homosexual behaviour as a perversion, understood not in moral or legal terms, but rather in the sense of a developmental deviation from the norm. Kafka does not show any consistent interest in these works, but his descriptions of non-heterosexual behaviours show to be perverted, too, but in a more classical

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[42] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 5.

[43] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

[44] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Ravna R. Reiter (London: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 157-210.

[45] Jane Pilcher, Imelda Whelean, *50 Key concepts in Gender Studies* (New York: SAGE, 2004).

[46] Thomas W. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Harvard UP, 1990).

[47] Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

[48] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[49] Lynne Segal, "After Judith Butler: Identities, Who Needs Them?," *Subjectivity*, 25 (2008): 381-394.

[50] Martha Nussbaum, "The Professor of Parody," *The New Republic*, 22 (1999): 37-45.

[51] Freud, *Three Essays*.

way: while heterosexuality is described as pragmatic and unpleasant, homosexual encounters are more sensual and emotional, but also happen in dreams or imagination, showing that they do not belong to the standards of reality. Evelyn Torton Beck, whose essay was one of the inspirations for this thesis, suggests that Kafka may have been homosexual, but unable to recognize and admit his sexuality due to the implications this may have had in his environment.[52] *Description of a Struggle* (together with some letters and passages of Kafka's diary) suggests more than any other story that the idea is not far-fetched, at least at a subconscious level. The story is divided into three chapters. In the first, the protagonist, a young man, meets an acquaintance at a party and tells the reader about him. The second chapter is the most dream-like: the narrator jumps on the friend's back and is carried through the streets of the city that become an imaginary landscape reacting to the narrator's thoughts until the friend injures his leg and is left on the road like a wounded horse. The narrator then meets a fat man who narrates the story of a supplicant who prays by smashing his head on the ground. At the end of the chapter, the fat man drowns. In the final chapter, the narrator, back into reality, keeps describing his walk next to his acquaintance. The translation of the original term *Kampf* as *Struggle* is more appropriate in English than in other languages, that often stress the war-related meaning of the word rather than the internal conflict. In fact, the narrator is clearly fighting the urge to be closer and more intimate with his acquaintance and expresses several times his jealousy for the fact that the acquaintance was kissed by a woman at the end of the party.

Homosexuality and Kafka's suspected homoerotic tendencies raise the connection with the queer theory and the perversion of gender I refer to in the chapter. It is impossible and irrelevant to establish Kafka's sexuality, but through queer theory I show how Kafka's literature plays with and manipulates gender roles and social expectations of sexuality and gender akin to contemporary understandings of gender as a social superimposition. The foundation for this comparison comes from Anne-Marie Jagose[53] and Butler's conclusions about queerness and its social understanding. Gilman's *The Jewish Patient* discusses the expression of masculinity and femininity in relation to the Jewish culture. Elizabeth Boa made some reference to the gender and sexuality expressed by some of Kafka's characters. I introduce in this chapter the idea of a perversion of gender through the performance of more than the standard two genders. Through the analysis of some stories and film adaptations, I show the performance of femininity and masculinity in Kafka's stories. Stieg offers valuable sources for Kafka's view of femininity as performance of either motherhood or prostitution,[54] always inferior to male dominance, as Beck explains.[55] In the stories, women almost always belong to either extreme of the mother/whore dichotomy expressed by Otto Weininger, even if Kafka's "mothers" are careful nurturers, regardless of them being literal mothers or not. On the other hand, Kafka represents masculinity and power as connected in his writings. In fact, authority figures are always male and never the main characters: although the protagonists may have some power in their work or environment, it is always a social, limited power and not the same power held by other male figures. In fact, I suggest here the addition of the undefinable gender of Kafka's main characters, inspired by Dagmar Lorenz's essay,[56] according to which Kafka's characters are almost never specifically male or female. This example of perversion is but one instance of how accepted standards do not necessarily describe every possible reality.

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[52] Evelyn Tornton Beck, "Kafka's Triple Bind: Women, Jews and Sexuality," in *Kafka's Contextuality,* ed. Alan Udoff (New York: Gordian, 1986), 343-388.

[53] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory* (Melbourne UP, 1996).

[54] Gerald Stieg, "Kafka and Weininger," in *Jews and Gender: Responses to Otto Weininger*, ed. Nancy A. Harrowitz and Barbara Hyams (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995).

[55] Evelyn Torton Beck, "Kafka's Traffic in Women: Power, Gender and Sexuality," *The Literary Review* 26, no. 4 (Summer 1983): 567-576.

[56] Lorenz, "Kafka and Gender".

Finally, in this chapter I introduce the idea of Kafka's closet prose, an adaptation of the closet drama concept explained by Nick Salvato[57] and Marta Straznicky.[58] Like its equivalent in performing arts, Kafka's closet prose defies embodiment and representation because it shows a private experience that cannot be fully represented by anyone other than the author. His prose is meant to be a personal introspection of Kafka's personality, a way to explore his perverted desires and observe their consequences. Its publication perverts the scope of its writing, as I show in the relevant section of this chapter.

During the chapter I use several references to Kafka's *Diaries* and *Letters*, being the best insight into his approach to life and events, but also to Brod's biography of Kafka, as the most reliable external perspective on the author. The *Letter to His Father* will be particularly relevant in this chapter to understand the examples and perception of gender roles and performances that shaped Kafka's understanding of the social behaviour of the two sexes, that he then perverts.

Although this chapter will be mainly focused on the literary perspective, I also use film adaptations of *The Metamorphosis* to show how the performance of gender has been seen in the context of an explicit performance. I do the same also for the theatre adaptation of *The Metamorphosis* from the eyes of the director,[59] but this time talking about the preparation of the performance rather than the performance itself. This will show the peculiar difficulty that Kafka imposes on the embodiment of the gender performance of some of his characters.

The primary literature I use in the chapter consists mainly of *The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial* and *The Judgment*. I summarize the last two more extensively in the section relative to the chapter about Law. I also refer to the authority figures using the example of *A Country Doctor*. In this story, the main character is called in the middle of the night during a snowstorm by a family whose son is in a critical condition. Unable to reach the patient because his horses died, the doctor is offered two stallions by a man (the groom) who unexpectedly exits from his pig sty. As a reward for the stallions, the groom demands to have Rosa, the doctor's maid, and chases her into the house, bashing the door open while the horses take the doctor to his destination without letting him refuse the groom's offer.

Once inside the patient's house, the doctor is welcomed by the family and offered rum, which he refuses, but he at first cannot find anything wrong with the patient. After being begged to visit him again, the doctor finds an open axe wound, the description of which is that of a "horrific male vision of a vagina".[60] After the discovery, the patient's family starts what looks like a sacrificial ritual ("If they use me for sacred purposes, I let that happen to me as well", in which the contrast between the *heiligen Zwecken* and, one sentence before, the *chirurgischen Hand* seems to underline the descent from science into superstition and therefore the end of the doctor):[61] the doctor is stripped of his clothes by the village elders and forced to lie next to the wounded boy while the schoolboys and their teacher chant a simple melody. Before trying, probably unsuccessfully, to escape, the doctor is told by his patient that he never had his trust.

I also refer to *The Burrow,* written just before Kafka's death, to show my point about the performance of Kafka's main characters as that of a different gender. The story is told in first person from the perspective of a mole-like creature who has just managed to build his safe burrow after several failed attempts. The burrow provides an escape route which is also an easy way in for potential dangers that the protagonist dreams about at night. However, addressing one of the potential objections, the narrator says that he would rather not cover that tunnel, because he needs to know he has a quick way out at all times. In fact, the narrator is afraid of other creatures,

[57] Nick Salvato, *Uncloseting Drama* (Yale UP, 2010).

[58] Marta Straznicky, "Closet Drama," in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama, ed.* Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 416-428.

[59] Steven Berkoff, *Meditations on Metamorphosis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

[60] Robert J. Andreach, *Len Jenkins Theatre: Wonder and Heart* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), 97.

[61] Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, (New York: Schocken, 1995), 128.

possibly legendary, that could be lurking in the dark and digging through the ground who could also attack him. He is aware he may be able to defend himself, but a way out seems to him preferable to the option of dealing with an attack. The story continues with a detailed description of the burrow, the best feature of which, according to the narrator, is its complete silence and stillness that allow to walk in it for hours without hearing anything. Immediately after the reassurance given by stillness and silence, there are two contrasting sentiments represented with two rooms: the central room of the burrow, which the narrator calls Castle Keep (*Burgplatz*), makes him feel even safer and proud to be living in such a well organized fashion, as it contains all the food one could need and emanates a beautiful fragrance throughout the burrow. On the contrary, the burrow labyrinth, the first thing he built in the burrow, scares him. Being in front of the exit, it creates a difficulty in case of escape, and this fear paralyses the creature to the point that, when he goes out, he is afraid to get back in just because of the construction. When inside, he avoids looking at it, but the constant thought creates in him an even bigger fear. The final part of the story is a reflection about the narrator's lack of freedom given by his attachment to the burrow, which he admires and loves so much that he stares at it from every perspective, constantly thinks about it and makes him feel guilty for having something that perfect. The obsession for the building makes him fear that it could be destroyed by attackers he admits he could be imagining. The story closes with the realization that no one could be trusted with taking care of the burrow and, alone and with the constant thoughts of enemy, the creature can only remain confined where he feels safe and in danger at the same time, worrying about the course of action to deal with the sounds of what could be a mortal enemy, a harmless neighbour or just his imagination.

The story is seen as a symbol of Kafka's acceptance of a situation with which he was never comfortable. This can be interpreted in several ways and I leave further interpretations to other critics. My point in the third chapter is to show how Kafka managed to display a social construct like gender ahead of time by showing the perversion of the corresponding social standards of his time. As it uses a mole-like creature, this story is also connected to the next chapter, which analyses the perversion of humanity.

NON-HUMAN ANIMALS: THE PERVERSION OF HUMANITY

In the fourth chapter I analyse the use Kafka makes of animals and non-human creatures and suggest this as a perversion of humanity. I define it this way because Kafka shows how thin is the line separating humans and animals, in the same way as he shows the line between genders to be equally thin. As spectators, humans impose their own perspective on the performance they are watching, defining as different, and potentially refusing, everything that does not match their expectations, including the expected behaviour of animals, who are not supposed to be like humans.

It is worth mentioning the span between the major critical works on animals in Kafka: from Fingerhut's monograph published in 1969,[62] it was in 2010 that two more monographs focusing on animals and animality were published by Jochen Therman[63] and Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri,[64] raising once more interest in this aspect of Kafka's literature. These essays focus predominantly on the environment of the stories, the kind of animals Kafka talks about, the classification of stories, Kafka's identification with these animals and other useful insights about the motivations behind Kafka's choices. In these works, and occasionally during the 40 years between these books, critics have referenced animals as Kafka's "other". I agree with this view, but I extend upon this insight and show how Kafka deals with the "others" to show how it is

[62] Karl-Heinz Fingerhut, *Die Funktion der Tierfiguren im Werke Franz Kafkas* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969).

[63] Jochen Thermann, *Kafkas Tiere: Fährten, Bahnen und Wege der Sprache* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2010).

[64] Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri, *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids and Other Fantastic Beings* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).

through social perspectives that we establish standards defining "others" opposed to "normal". Through the performance of perversions, Kafka shows that social standards pervert a group of "normal" entities, making them "other", without any ontological difference. Humanity is a performance in the same way as gender. Masculinity and humanity are the standards that we start from when referring to their opposite as a lack of, or a performative difference from, the former. The first point of the chapter will be to show how the line dividing humans and animals is quite subtle. Donna Haraway's manifesto[65] is a perfect source to discuss the "otherness" attributed to animals is similar to the "otherness" attributed to the queer community. The same reasoning leads to the understanding of anthropocentric power games over animals, the framework for which is provided by several essays contained in Rob Boddice's book.[66]

The masculine/feminine relationship is often represented or parodied in the so-called drag performances, so it is no surprise that we can find similar elements in the animal/human relationship described by Kafka. When showing and interpreting elements of drag representation of animals performed by humans, I borrow from Katrin Sieg's concept of ethnic drag.[67] Sieg, through case studies and observations, shows how the substitution of one ethnicity with another (or species, in Kafka's case) redraws the boundaries between who is represented and who performs the representation, highlighting the dark aspects of either through the performance of an outsider. As Sieg underlines, the inversion of roles shows the repetition of standards that are just taken for granted by the audience members belonging to the represented group. These performances create the space to start a conversation and allow of the comprehension of power dynamics. Similarly, Kafka's racial drag facilitates the understanding of modern power dynamics through his usual descriptive, image-dominated style.

The psychoanalytic perspective of the performance of human and animal behaviour by both groups is based on Caroline Case's study about the relationship between humans and pets and particularly the identification of children with animals.[68] Animals, according to Case, offer a way to divert the therapist (i.e. the critical reader, in Kafka's case) from some form of suffering thanks to their loss of verbal, human communication. A close relationship with pets, she argues, is a perversion of a natural relationship with other humans and suggests that individuals, particularly children, who identify with them do so to express a broken relationship with humanity. Freud had already noticed[69] how children imbue animals with respect and fear by recognising them as equals. Kafka follows a similar process of identification in a literal way: his animals either have the same behaviour as humans (either by being anthropomorphic or by being in either stage of a human-to-non-human transformation) or inspire humans with such powerful feelings that identification is a natural consequence. However, in the chapter I show that Kafka does not suggest identification as a solution, because, as Deleuze also suggests,[70] this would imply a hierarchy. I discuss more extensively the critical observations about Kafka's non-human creatures, but here it is worth mentioning Margot Norris's *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*[71] as one of my main sources to discuss the relationship that is established between nature and contemporary culture in Kafka's work.

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[65] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, people and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

[66] Rob Boddice, *Anthropocentrism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[67] Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Michigan UP, 2002).

[68] Caroline Case, *Imagining Animals: Art, Psychotherapy and Primitive States of Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[69] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1960).

[70] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Becoming Animal," in *Animal Philosophy*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (New York: Continuum, 2004), 152-176.

[71] Margot Norris, *Beasts of the modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst and Lawrence* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1985).

This chapter also focuses on Kafka's theatrical adaptations. Critical literature has often referred to Kafka as a theatrical author, starting with Benjamin's reference of Kafka's world as a world theatre[72] and Yoko Tawada's essay,[73] that shows how Kafka's description of physicality becomes a performative act for an audience of one. My focus on theatre adaptations for this chapter is mostly based on the performative expectations that we put on animals. In agreement with Ridout[74] and others, I discuss the role of the gaze of animals both as performers and as viewers that, Lacan observes, is related to an acknowledgment of our origins.[75] When we establish a connection through gaze with animals, we are acknowledging their primordial role and what Freud describes as a totemic representation. According to Lacan, gaze is mimicry, therefore we imitate animal behaviour and ask them to imitate ours through the performances we demand of them. Two of the stories I discuss in this chapter, *A Report to an Academy* and *Up in the Gallery* are clear representations of this mechanism of learning through imitation and gaze of a performance. The synopsis of both can be found in the chapter.

In the final section of the chapter, I discuss two theatre adaptations of *A Report to an Academy*, in which the speaker holds a conference to tell the story of how he became a human, even if he was born a monkey. The transition from animal to human is a metaphor of a transition from nature to culture. In the section, I show how standards are imposed by society on someone (a monkey, in this case) that is fully free from them. More specifically, and connecting this chapter to the previous, I show how gender is imposed on an ungendered creature through the performance of habits and repetitions that are eventually imitated. Like Mangan also observes, "It is not surprising that Kafka's observation and criticism of masculinity passes for a theatrical language and needs to be performed".[76] This story also shows the thin division between animal and human and how the two can be the same without the need for an additional mental process like identification.

In addition to *A Report to an Academy* and *Up in the Gallery*, I discuss four more stories in the chapter: *Investigations of a Dog*, *The Cares of a Family Man*, *A Crossbreed* and *Josefine the Singer*.

The cares of a Family Man and *A Crossbreed* are both short stories narrating the relationship between the main character, who is also the narrator, and a fantastic creature. In the first story the creature is called Odradek and described as a star-shaped series of threads of different colours and sorts with no apparent purpose, with a crossbar sticking out of it. In the second story, the creature is half lamb and half kitten. Neither story narrates any specific event, but both are an observation of the creatures and describe how the owner relates emotionally to them. Odradek is capable of talking, making him more human-like, while the crossbreed can only look at the owner and both their gaze and human-like performance have performative effects, generating in the onlookers feelings and doubts that the narrator links to death.

The other two stories are the clearest example of human behaviour in animals that determines the recreation of standards and expectations in the performance of the other. *Investigations of a Dog* is the first-person narration of a dog whose intent is to understand the source of food. In a direct narration with the audience, the dog relates his scientific interest for the understanding of the world, even if, in his view, humans do not exist and he is only capable of seeing other dogs. His limitation is an ironical mirroring of the anthropocentric perspective, in which every standard starts from a human point of view that gets eventually perverted, but is

[72] Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: on The Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *Selected Writings 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, (Harvard UP, 1999), 795-818.

[73] Yoko Tawada, "Kafkas Performing Arts," in *Odradeks Lachen, ed.* Hansjorg Bay and Christof Hamann (Freiburg: Rombach Litterae, 2006), 347-360.

[74] Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge UP, 2006).

[75] Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.

[76] Michael Mangan, *Staging Masculinity: History, Gender, Performance* (London: Macmillan Education UK, 2003), 247.

not ontologically necessary. The dog compares himself to other dogs and realizes he is excluded by his social group because of his inquisitive nature. According to the narrator, his sense of inquiry started when he met a group of seven dogs who, out of thin air and with remarkable precision, managed to produce such a beautiful music that he lost every control and followed them. While he is relating this event, we realize again that the story is a sarcastic representation of the shock caused by perverse behaviour in those who establish the standards. In fact, the dogs commit the, from the narrator's perspective, abominable act of walking on two legs, which shows them naked, a sin reminiscent of Adam and Eve. The performance of the musical dogs is connected to the perversion of their act, that makes them closer to humans and therefore perverted in the eyes of an animal. Kafka is here showing readers how standards vary with the variation of perspective and therefore how everything can be a perversion, given the right point of view.

At the end of the story, the dog sets his next goal of studying music with the same carefulness that he is using for other scientific questions, but, in a turn of events, admits not to be scientifically literate and to be only interested in the questions in order to pursue a sense of freedom inspired by his instinct. The finale connects stereotypically animal and human elements in an organic description that leaves the reader wondering where is the separation between the realms and doubting if it is really that perverse to see human features in a dog.

Josephine the Singer is the last story written by Kafka and is also discussed in the third chapter, being the only story in which the main character is female. The narrator, like every other character of the story, is a mouse. In his community, everyone is fascinated by Josephine's singing skills that allow mice to cope with their hard lives. However, during the story, doubts of all sorts are raised: some members of the community suggest that Josephine is not singing, but whistling, which everyone in the community can do, and even the narrator starts doubting his own judgment about Josephine's ability. Like the dog in the previous story, the narrator wonders if music is really as valuable as the silence in which music can exist. Silence is the starting point, the neutral condition from which every music (i.e. every social standard that shows itself through a performance) starts. Gradually, the description of Josephine's talent is mitigated to the point that she becomes someone with little talent and a huge ego. The more the narrator describes her talent as minute, the more Josephine disappears. At the end of the story, she is but a memory, has not affected anyone's life substantially, is barely missed and will soon be forgotten.

In these stories Kafka shows how expectations and performances play vital roles in our understanding and creation of standards. His poetics shows the power relationships established between the authoritative creators of standards, who are also hypocritically not subject to them, and those who can only perform those standards, if they do not want to pay the consequence of their perversion. However, standards are also adaptable: what is considered as a perversion when committed by an individual is a new standard when accepted by a group. Like Josephine's music that everyone is forced to treat as sublime until the group decides otherwise, standards can be changed, are soon forgot and leave space to new performances. Every standard in Kafka's literature is originated and controlled by a superior entity that not many can understand and those who can have power over everyone else: Law.

A PERVERTED JUSTICE: LAW IN KAFKA'S LITERATURE

In the fifth chapter, I discuss Kafka's view of Law in his stories. I focus my attention on the general behaviour of Law, comparing it to that of the Jewish tradition, and the use of punishment as a perverted system to treat rules and standards as if they were ontologically correct. In this chapter I also analyse two film adaptations of *The Trial* and discuss Kafka's stories in which Law is explicitly used as a perverted social regulator. The reason to discuss Law in the last chapter is that every standard and social system described in the previous chapters is created by this Law above the secular law.

As mentioned in the biography, Kafka was a lawyer with full understanding of the law: through Reza Banakar's[77] and Martha Robinsons'[78] essays, I show how the fictional Law is based on the Czech legislation of the time, but modified enough to create a system that fully encompasses and regulates every aspect of everyone's life. Kafka's legal competence allows him to place his characters in a completely external perspective. They approach the higher system regulating life like someone who is trying to deal with the legal system for the first time. Although some of his characters know laws and regulations, they are still alienated from the world's real mechanics,[79] because, using Henk van Houtum's metaphor, his characters are observing Law from its border.[80]Their understanding of laws governing society is only apparently similar to what is needed to understand the higher Law, but they never get to that point of complete knowledge. As Douglas Litowitz notes, the outsider's perspective has several implications for contemporary legal theory, but it is also a literary way to place characters into the bourgeois construction without them being aware of it. When dealing with their lives, the main characters keep alternating between their desire to live a non-perverted life and the incomprehensible demands imposed by a Law that needs to perpetrate standards and perversions for its own survival.

Agreeing with Mladek,[81] the Law discussed here has several similarities with the godly Law of the Torah, being all-seeing, all-punishing and often deadly, but also demanding a constant performance to prove its power. The comparison with Jewish procedures and tradition will be made clearer through the description of trials and Hannah Arendt's essay on the performative nature of justice at Eichmann's trial.[82] Although there are abundant references to a godly presence, Kafka does not explicitly refer to such an entity: the Law exists as a set of rules and regulations, but also as a corpus without a clear origin. Like the performances imposed to create the dualism of genders and humanity/animality, Law also demands specific performances, but there is no responsible group or person who started imposing them. They simply exist and their perversion is a crime that has to be punished. To show the perverted performance of trials in Kafka's narrative, I use his own letter to his father. In this letter, Kafka creates a trial in which he is both victim and, in a narcissistic turn, judge of a father, who is both on trial and his son's judge.

The perversion of justice extends to punishment, which I discuss in accordance with Freud's description of law[83] as an instrument to restrict human instincts and Foucault's view that punishment is needed to impose power, legitimise and regulate a correct behaviour (the standards). Once the artificial standards are treated as normal, they are imposed on society through teaching, repetition and fear. These three elements are related to each other: fear of the punishment brings the acceptance of repetition and through repetition of "legal" acts, the correct behaviour is passively treated as an unquestionable standard. Repetition and imitation are the two main performative tools used to impose Law. The theatricalization of the trial is also, according to Penney, a way to impose the power of the punisher over the believer, to the point of normalising the perversion of establishing standards and treat them as absolutely true.[84] Following from Foucault's perspective, Goldberg's already cited *The Problem of Perversion* discusses how law controls rage and aggression, but their repression brings perversion to the surface through murder and sadomasochistic acts that dehumanize the individual. The factory

[77] Reza Banakar, "In Search of Heimat".

[78] Marta S. Robinson, "The Law of the State in Kafka's 'The Trial'," *ALSA Forum* 6, no.2 (1982): 127-148.

[79] Douglas E. Litowitz, "Franz Kafka's Outsider Jurisprudence." *Law and Social Inquiry* 27, no.1 (2002): 103-137.

[80] Hend van Houtum, "Waiting before the Law: Kafka on the Border." *Social & Legal studies* 19, no.3 (2010): 285-297.

[81] Klaus Mladek, "Radical Play: Gesture, Performance, and the Theatrical Logic of the Law in Kafka." *The Germanic Review* 78, no.3 (2003): 223-249.

[82] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963).

[83] Freud, *Totem and Taboo.*

[84] Penney, *World of Perversion.*

mechanization and increasing technological advancements that Kafka was witnessing in his age, together with his understanding of the gruesome accidents that could happen because of it, correspond to Goldberg's explanation of machines as destroyers of empathy and therefore creators of fertile grounds for perversion. Kafka understands that the previous standard of empathy and human work is now destroyed and perverted in a human-machine relationship. Machine cold, mechanical behaviour determine deadly consequences for those who commit mistakes, voluntary or not, and therefore become the perfect symbol for Kafka's Law that regulates and punishes. Being stronger, more productive and more effective, machines dictate their cold Law in the human world and the consequence for a mistake is unempathetic and immediate: mutilation, death and the continuation of the productive process. Kafka uses machines in a metaphorical fashion to describe a machine-like legal process applied to every field of life: those who live in a world dominated by a perverted Law can only obey or be punished. Perverted acts, according to Goldberg, happen as a reaction to a loss of control and Kafka shows exactly this: Law dictates standards and behaviours, dehumanises humans by treating them like cogs, but when it loses control, a violent reaction is the only possible reaction. However, Kafka shows the perspective of the victims of perversion by siding with them, making them "heroes of the weaks",[85] who suffer and die, but are not passive parts of a standardized behaviour. Gregor Samsa may be an insect for everyone who is part of the Law, but for himself and the readers, members of a non-perverted world, he is still a human.

Orson Welles relates to this analysis of Kafka's Law by representing the objectification of men through a mechanical Law in 1962 in the film *The Trial* which will be analysed in chapter five and compared with David Jones' version. Given that these are not the only film adaptations, to choose which ones to compare, I have used Lev's[86] and Brady's and Hughes[87] studies of Kafka's adaptations. The main reason for the choice is to compare two diametrically different versions. Welles' work is based on a subjective view of Kafka's Law that demands a standard, mechanical behaviour, while Jones' version is an almost faithful adaptation of the novel. The main critical sources for the analysis of these movies are Gussow's interview with Pinter,[88] who wrote the script for Jones' movie, Welles' interview with the *Cahiers du cinema*[89] and Naremore's perspective on Welles' films.[90]

The main character of the story, Joseph K. (whose surname is indicated only with the first letter, as to stress the fact that he is only a name in a bureaucratic list) is arrested on his thirtieth birthday as soon as he wakes up in his room. The reasons for his arrest are never explained, but this is not the only perverted feature of the arrest itself: he is allowed to go freely and live his life with the knowledge of being under arrest. In the following days, he is summoned to an inquiry, which is held in an apartment building rather than in a courthouse. Without knowing anything precise, Josef wanders through the rooms until he finds a washerwoman who helps him find the courtroom. Once there, he calls out the magistrates and the court for their superficiality and corruption, but, doing so, he is advised that he has damaged his own case. During the speech, Kafka establishes the main difference between the non-perverted law and the incomprehensible Law. Josef, in fact, denounces the laughable setting and official behaviour based on standards and expectations of a non-perverted law. However, that is not the law he is being judged by and this will affect his case in the future. Back to the court in a day with no summons, Josef finds out that the building is nothing more than what it looks like when the

[85] Müller-Seidel,*Brief an den Vater*.

[86] Peter Lev, "Three Adaptations of 'The Trial'," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 12, no.3 (1984): 180-185.

[87] Martin Brady, Helen Hughes, "'The Essential is Sufficient: the Kafka Adaptations of Orson Welles, Straub-Huillet and Michael Haneke," in *Mediamorphosis*, ed. Shai Binderman and Ido lewit (New York: Columbia UP, 2016), 181-197.

[88] Mel Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter* (London: Nick Hern, 1994).

[89] Orson Welles, *The trial: a Film* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).

[90] James Naremore, *The Magic World of Orson Welles* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

representatives of the Law are not around. He meets the washerwoman who helped him before and discovers that the law books are actually pornographic novels, closing the Kafkian circle of perversions starting from sex and leading to the intricated mechanics of Law. Once at work, Josef is visited by his uncle, who, although angry for not having been warned of the arrest, introduces Josef to an old friend of his: the lawyer Huld. During the meeting at the lawyer's house, though, his nurse Leni distracts and seduces Josef. This distraction, according to Josef's uncle, damages again every hope of success. After a few days of distraction and insecurity that affects his work, Josef meets a client who tells him about Titorelli, the court painter, who apparently has indirect power over the judges and therefore every case. Josef meets the painter in his studio, that is constantly spied on by young girls mocking the painter and his guests. During the meeting, Titorelli explains that it is unheard of to be completely acquitted, but he could push his acquaintances to help Josef's case be endlessly deferred. The downside, though, is that the person is never officially innocent. Josef is at this point determined to deal personally with the case and, because he feels nothing is being done, he fires Huld and ignores his requests to reconsider. In an attempt to show how a good client should behave, Huld calls Block, another client of his. Block follows the lawyer's humiliating orders by the letter and his masochistic behaviour confirms that the only acceptable approach for the Law is to completely give up every form of humanity in exchange for a temporary feeling of freedom. Some time after firing Huld, Josef is asked to accompany a client to a cathedral, but the client does not come. Instead of him, a priest approaches Josef and, after introducing himself as the prison chaplain, he tells the parable *Before the Law*, a clear and highly metaphorical description of Law in Kafka's novels. On his thirty-first birthday, Josef is arrested again by two men, but this time he is taken to his execution place, where he will die, as the story concludes, like a dog.

The story offers the best perspective on Kafka's effects of the Law and connects all of the elements shown in this thesis, from the different performances of genders to the metaphorical human-animal behaviour when performing under the gaze of those who establish standards. In the next chapter, I use more stories, partially or in full, to illustrate my points about the importance of performance and perversion in Kafka's stories. However, the primary and secondary literature described so far offer an initial panorama over Kafka's artistic vision of a perverted world that depends on standards. In the next chapter, I discuss how this perversion came to be through the analysis of Kafka's main source of inspiration: his life.

CHAPTER TWO

PERFORMING THE PERVERSE SELF

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

In this chapter I give an overview about the different kinds of perversions, some of which will be explored in more detail in the following chapters, used by Kafka. I also relate them to Kafka's life and to some theatre and film adaptations to explain how performances influence Kafka's narrative. I also argue that performativity is essential in Kafka's prose, being the result of perverted events.

One of the most accepted arguments about Kafka is that the source for his works and the main topics he deals with are to be found in his biography.[91] His life influenced his writings so much that most of them can be related to some of the most important themes and events, which sometimes even intertwine with each other. His approach to gender, sexuality, performativity and, in general, the topics analysed in this and the following chapters are no exception.

As explained in the previous chapter, we cannot interpret perversion only in its sexual connotation, but, more generally, as a radical deviation from the norm. My intent in this chapter is to show where we can find expressions of perversions in Kafka's life, thus making it possible to understand what can be considered perversion and why it is so prevalent in his works. In the past, perversion has been read mainly as, for example, the strong masochistic component in *In the Penal Colony*,[92] however the same act of dealing with sexual habits or use sexuality, at least symbolically, in a way that we can define perverse can be found in several other fields when studying Kafka.

THE PERVERSION OF THE OUTSIDER

The chapter shows that, being, or feeling as, an outsider is a recurring theme in Kafka's life and narrative. According to the definition of perversion given before, being an outsider is the main form of perversion and does not suggest any negative meaning, but simply an objective deviation from standards, as people are usually expected to belong to a social group of some kind, particularly in a society in which standard behaviours defined by tradition and education are expected to be followed at least superficially, like a performance.

Kafka belonged to many groups, while at the same time he was not fully part of any: he was a Jew with little knowledge of Jewish traditions and little or no faith. He was a Czech speaking German and thus belonged, in theory, to the social elite, but at the same time protested against this "phony" culture.[93] He was a son who lived almost his whole life with his parents, but was afraid of his father, as shown in the *Letter to His Father*, and constantly complained about the situation in his house. He was a lawyer who did not practice as such and whose perception of law was that of an intricate and destructive machine monopolised by individuals who set arbitrary standards for their own good, as we will see in the last chapter. He performed the expected role of the male by flirting with many women, getting engaged and visiting brothels regularly, but his works and life raise some questions about his sexuality and gender identity. He was a writer of

[91] There are too many critical works that either discuss about or assume this to be cited. To give one example of each, see Anthony Northey, "Myths and Realities in Kafka's Biography," in Preece, *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* and Margot Norris, "Kafka's Josefine: The Animal as the Negative Side of Narration,," in *MLN* 98, no.3 (1983): 366-383.

[92] See, among others, Margot Norris, "Sadism and Masochism in Two Kafka Stories: 'In Der Strafkolonie' and 'Ein Hungerkünstler'," *MLN* 93, no.3 (1978): 430-447 and Chapter four of John Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism and the Traffic of Writing* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2005).

[93] Wagenbach, *Kafka*, 51.

fiction who burnt most of his writings, was sceptical about publishing and spent much of his creative life writing little or nothing at all, if we exclude letters and diaries, and other periods immersed in obsessive writing.

Perversion is addressed by Kafka through his characters, whose stories show how perspectives influence the understanding of the same event. The title character of *The Hunger Artist* gets furious when his truth is perverted by the audience's misunderstanding of the end of his fasting: "[the melancholy caused by] the premature ending of his fasting [is] presented as the cause of it".[94] He gets angry at the fact that people mistake his melancholic mood as caused by fasting and not by the end of it. However, from the eyes of the reader, perversion lies in the artist, who is glad to torture himself with hunger to the point of fasting to death just because he cannot find any food he likes. Even his role as a performer is perverted: although he needs an audience to keep performing, he does not want to be liked nor admired: his performance is not a performance of his art, but the performance of his real desire. As a performer he is an outsider because he is not separating his life from his art. The film adaptation directed in 2004 by Mike Testin represents the self-exclusion of the artist from the world in an effective way by showing a point of view of the artist just before the cage is being opened for the last time. From his own perspective, we do not see human limbs, but the legs of an insect, highlighting his diversity from the human audience surrounding him. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa becomes an insect and remains confined in his room in his family's house. Even if he is seen like an insect and treated every day more like one, he keeps his human behaviour and understanding and tries to join the family, but is sent back to the room every time he tries to leave it, representing his status of an outsider. In an inversion of the situation showed in *The Metamorphosis*, the hunger artist represented by Testin sees himself as an insect incapable of being understood by humans, who see him for what he is. The hunger artist does not mutate to the eyes of the others and, unlike Gregor, he does not want to leave his cage. What Testin showed by mutating him in an insect at the end of the story is that the two characters are just two sides of the same coin. If Gregor is an insect, an outsider, who would like to be accepted, the artist perceives himself as an insect and keeps himself excluded from society through his fasting, even though he would like to find some food he likes and be part of that society. Both of them use starvation as the only solution for their perverted status and both of them are disposed of quickly.

Like their author, all of Kafka's most famous characters, and several of the lesser known, are outsiders, often by choice, even when they belong to different races. A dog who thinks other dogs do not have the right approach to life (*Investigations of a Dog*) and decides to use the scientific method to understand the world around him is an outsider and shows the same kind of perversion to his spectators as a person who finds himself suddenly transformed into an insect with human feelings and behaviours, but not human enough to be next to his family *(The Metamorphosis*). I have already discussed how the hunger artist is another similar example, but the same can be told about a bachelor who is surrounded by married couples and does not mind his lonely life and meals (*Bachelor's Ill Luck*), about an animal who is half predator and half prey, does not have offspring nor a name and for whom only a butcher's knife would be a release (*A Crossbreed*), or about citizens who would like to become soldiers and join the conscription taking place in a village next to theirs, but are sent away and hit for not belonging to that place, defined as a house (*The Conscription of Our Troops*). Almost every story written by Kafka describes outsiders and all of them can be recognized as such through their standard-defying performances, a key element to understand Kafka's poetics.

EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT PERFORMANCES

As we have just seen, outsiders are most of the main characters and they are victims or causes of different kinds of perversions. Their stories and narration are influenced by the second

[94] Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 305.

main element discussed in this thesis: the performative and, as needed in every performance, the spectator.

Kafka's performances can be divided into two main groups: explicit and implicit performances. Explicit performances are those that can be recognized as performance in a traditional sense, with a performative space, the suspention of disbelief and every other usual acknowledgment and agreement happening between audience and performer. The already mentioned protagonist of *The Hunger Artist* is a performer in a traditional sense, even if he enjoys fasting. The performance becomes here the expression of the perversion in the relationship with food and art. This performance is in itself perverted: it is neither negative nor positive, but an act that deviates from the norm, as instead of being for the public, it has personal reasons. It is not the display of a protest, nor the rejection of intolerable social constraints, as Maud Ellmann suggests when talking about hunger artists,[95] but a personal preference that would not be different if there was no audience, as the end of the short story confirms. His act leads to a second perversion: although an explicit performance assumes a clear distinction of roles, the hunger artist is the spectator of the world outside the cage, where people can eat, but, because he has no part in it, his performance reaches its apex by leading to literal starvation.

Another example of an explicit performance is the circus act in *Up in the Gallery*. In this short parable, Kafka first describes a hypothetical circus act going on forever, at some point of which a spectator yells: "Stop!" in the attempt to make it end. After the fantasy has been described, the real circus act is described in a mix of detailed description and realistic guesses based on what the narrator can see. The spectator who imagined to stop the eternal performance now can only sigh and weep. In the story, both a perverted and a normal act are described and only the first one allows the man to speak out his frustration, while the second forces him to be a silent part of the audience, as there is no perversion on stage to justify a different behaviour. However, the narrator suggests that the superficial normality of the real performance hides some form of perversion, at least from the perspective of the suffering protagonist.

Implicit performances are those events in which a routine or an act takes place that closely resembles a performance or a public appearance, a ritual or an outing. The only difference is that they do not involve the classical performance conventions. Not only these events match the description of a performance, but they are also performative.[96]

In *The Metamorphosis*, when the insect in which their son mutated dies, the Samsa family gets dressed up and walks along the city in a parade. Finally all out at once, they realize how beautiful their daughter is, now ready to be seen and ready for marriage. The parade has all the elements of a performance and becomes the celebration of the family's re-gained "normality" after the perverted events described in the story. In the same way, the father-judge of *The Judgment* is histrionic when preparing to sentence his son to death, even if he is only dressed in a dirty nightgown:

> [The father] threw the blankets off with a strength that sent them all flying in a moment and sprang erect in bed [...] leaned forward but did not fall over [...] merely nodded towards George's corner, emphasizing the truth of what he's said [...] swung his arms over his head [...] threw a newspaper page which had somehow been carried into the bed right at George.[97]

[95] Maude Ellmann, *Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (London: Virago Press, 1993).

[96] For a reference on the role of performativity and the way in which it produces actions and thoughts, refer to John-David Dewsbury, "Performativity and the Event: Enacting a Philosophy of Difference," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000): 473-496.

[97] Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, 112.

The immediacy of the action is better rendered in the original German, in which the sentences become increasingly visual, going from a full sentence at the beginning (*warf die Decke mit einer Kraft, dass sie einen Augenblick im Fluge sich ganz entfaltete*) to the simple use of images that prioritize actions through short verbs and nouns thrown at the end at a fast pace (*seinen Arm schwang er vor Begeisterung*) going through a mix of the two stiles to describe the actions in between (*Der Vater nickte bloss, die Wahrheit dessen beteuernd, was er sagte, in Georgs Ecke hin*). These actions can be easily compared to exaggerated poses made during a theatrical performance and have the same intent to show confidence and authority to its viewer. Even in this case, the performance reaches its apex becoming truth and causing the death of the spectator, in this case the son.

In *The Country Doctor*, after visiting his patient for the second time and finding a mortal wound on his side, the doctor is forcefully stripped of his clothes and placed next to the patient like a sacrificial victim in a pagan ritual. When the doctor manages to escape, the patient's family and other villagers turn against him, in what reminds the angry mob trying to capture Frankenstein's monster, ready to sacrifice the scapegoat.

Examples of implicit performances also come from Kafka's life: in a passage of the *Letter to His Father*, Kafka describes his shame for his body that he compares to his father's. When the two go together on holiday and get changed, Kafka stays in the hut as long as possible and only comes out when his father calls him. The moment in which they leave the hut together can be seen as an implicit performance: for Kafka, staying in the hut was a way to be noticed by the father who needs to call him out like an actor waiting for his cue, and, at the same time, to publicly show to an audience of bathers his father's body and swimming skills as better than his.

Explicit and implicit performances often cause each other, but none of them could happen without the presence of an audience. In Kafka's narrative, audiences are often involuntary, made of one person or influencing the performance and unaware to be witnessing a performance.

AUDIENCE AND THE "INNOCENT" SPECTATOR

In the previous chapter, I showed the necessity to have three elements in every performance, both implicit and explicit: time, performer and audience. The first indicates the temporary character of a performance and the other two involve the parts who make and receive the performance. In Kafka's literature performers are often involuntary, unaware to be performing, like the outsider mentioned above and the same happens to audiences. Their unawareness puts them in the dual situation of being performers of their own story and "innocent" spectators of a world they cannot understand.

A common term in theatre is the "suspension of disbelief", referring to the indirect agreement between performers and audience, according to which the latter accepts to believe for the whole duration of the performance that the former is what they claim to be. In return, performers entertain through narration and are not supposed to do anything that interrupts the suspension. This agreement is perverted in Kafka's stories: as his performers are often involuntary, his audiences are equally often unaware and witness unprepared performances. In the case of explicit performances, the audience is aware of the performance they are taking part to, but unaware to be part of an implicit performance, too. The audience in *A Report to an Academy* is the best example of unawareness: as Benjamin suggested discussing the role of the readers of animal stories, "Most follow the stories without even realizing that they are about humanity".[98] We, as readers of the stories, are unaware audience of a human performance while we think we are reading an animal performance and so are the audience members of *A Report to an Academy*. In *The Trial*, the two types of audiences witness the same scene in two different

[98] Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1991), 680-681.

moments: Josef K.'s neighbours are first the voluntary audience of his arrest and add a comic tone to the whole scenes while they remain behind the door, eavesdropping and waiting for updates to his reactions :

> [The stranger] turned to the door and opened it slightly to say to someone who was obviously standing behind [the door] 'He wants Anna to bring him his breakfast.' Brief laughter in the neighbouring room ensued; from the sound it was unclear whether there were several people joining in or not.[99]

Later, Josef K. re-enacts the scene of his arrest for Fräulein Bürstner, his neighbour, in an explicitly theatrical way:

> May I move the bedside table away from your bed?' 'What are you thinking of ?' said Fräulein Bürstner. 'Of course not!' 'Then I can't show you,' said K., getting worked up as if that was doing him immeasurable harm. 'Oh well, if you need it for your demonstration, just move the table,' [...] K. placed the little table in the middle of the room and sat down at it. 'You need to have a true idea of where everyone was, it's very interesting. I'm the supervisor, two guards are sitting on the trunk over there, and three young men are standing by the photographs. There was a white blouse hanging from the window-catch, though that's only by the way. And now we can start. Oh, I'm forgetting myself, the most important person. Well, I'm standing here, on this side of the table. The supervisor is sitting very comfortably, legs crossed, one arm draped over the back of the chair, a real slovenly lout. So now it starts in earnest. The supervisor calls out as if he had to wake me up, he really shouts. Unfortunately I'll have to shout too, if I'm to make everything clear to you, though it's only my name he shouts.[100]

Josef moves the furniture to create the performing space, describes the positions of each actor and prop, establishes his role and mimics everyone's actions with such precision that he needs to create disturbance by shouting. Although his voluntary audience member tries to silence him, he is "too immersed in his role" (ibid.) and shouts his own name, thus making at least one neighbour become the involuntary audience members of the re-enactment of the same scene they had witnessed in person. The neighbours are present but invisible, like a theatrical audience, and affect the behaviour of the actors on stage, with even one of the "actors" talking to them, literally passing through the fourth wall (using a door, in this case). At the same time, they are generic characters affecting the story, like extras in a performance, and neither the "actors" nor the readers know how many of them are present. Kafka establishes hierarchies between the characters of the stories and the audience members to show the audience's perverted, sadistic voyeurism in search of human desperation. When the neighbours are audience of a real arrest, they giggle in anticipation, their sounds show they are having fun and the crowd, Josef assumes, gets bigger. They are ignored like hecklers and Josef continues his performance. When the arrest is fictitious and the misery only re-created, the audience is annoyed, makes sounds to stop it and the "actors" assume there is only one of them. However, they respect the audience's will, because even if there was only one audience member, he is a captain and therefore higher in hierarchy. The perverted attitude of the audience members is similar in other stories: in *Up in the Gallery*,

[99] Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009), 5.
[100] Ibid., 24.

the circus audience enjoys the spectacle of the perverted performance opposing a sick horse to healthy humans. In *A Hunger Artist*, the audience is divided into people enjoying the starvation of a human being (and later not enjoying it anymore simply because monotonous) and people who check on the artist. The main character appreciates the latter if they do their job carefully and buys them breakfast to thank them, showing again a hierarchical relationship between the two and an awareness of the appeal that audience members and performers have for each other.

The sadistic behaviour of spectators finds an exception in the "innocent" spectator. As it has been repeatedly established in performance studies, "character identification [is] the central dynamic to understand spectatorship"[101] and dark, horrific stories with perverted elements demand a higher level of empathy and identification to work.[102] As we have seen and are going to discuss further in the next sections, Kafka's own life was a huge inspiration for his stories, meaning that he identified with his characters and experienced their fate. In Kafka's stories the spectator is an innocent character, typically Kafka's alter-ego, which, with some exceptions,[103] ends up dying as a consequence of the performance. In many circumstances, the spectator wishes to be part of the performance itself, but, being one of Kafka's alter-egos, he is often an outcast and the only possibility to become part of the performance is to change his whole nature, like the ape of *A Report to an Academy*, who, in order to live outside of a cage, performs the role of a human to the point of becoming one. At the end of every story, we realize that perspectives play a fundamental role in Kafka's narrative: as opposed to horror movies or similar stories in which heroes and villains are easily determined, Kafka's stories almost never follow this pattern. The main characters are spectators of a world that is perverted to their eyes, but at the same time they are also a perversion from the perspective of the world and their deaths are only a natural consequence determined by a strict Law that demands adherence to standards.

The spectator of *The Metamorphosis* is Gregor, whose humanity is perverted and becomes powerless spectator of what takes place in the otherwise non-perverted house. However, he is also the performer of the event creating a revolution in the family. His parents and sister can only passively see what is happening and react to it without having any say on the transformation or Gregor's behaviour, like audience members of a performance. The two sides, Gregor and the rest of the family, keep swapping roles and it is hard to tell who began the performance leading to every other performance.[104]

The main character of *The Hunger Artist* also shows a similar behaviour: although performer of the perverted art, he is also the innocent spectator of non-perverted life, who wishes to be part of it by finding some food he likes, but is incapable of doing so. Imke Meyer shows how his art has become a job, however he is still an artist, "a privileged observer", an audience member who also "displays himself to his audience".[105] The cage, Meyer observes, protects the artist from having any intercourse with others. Considering the sadistic character of the audience of performances, this protection preserves his innocence. Proof is that, when he is out, he is forced to be like his audience and eat, thus acting like the what he considers perverted. However, the cage also divides standards from perversion, even if we cannot say on which side the two are. From the artist's perspective, the world is perverted because it does not contain any food he can eat and guilty of not letting him starve. From the perspective of the world, he is simply a

[101] Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 78.

[102] Rhona J. Berenstein, *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996).

[103] One of these exceptions is *A Report to an Academy*, in which there is no literal death of the protagonist, but it can be argued that his renunciation to his race is a form of death, at least metaphorical.

[104] The importance of Gregor's desire for something radical to happen was noted by early critics. One of the best examples is Walter H. Sokel, "Kafka's Metamorphosis: Rebellion and Punishment," *Monatshefte* 48, no.4 (1956): 203-214.

[105] Imke Meyer, "Kafka's 'A Hunger Artist as Allegory of Bourgeois Subject Construction," in *From Kafka to Sebald*, ed. Sabine Wilke (New York: Continuum, 2012), 28.

performer doing his job and it is his responsibility to feed himself. Because of these opposite views, Meyer compares the artist with "an employee who is punching the clock -it is no accident that the only piece of furniture in his cage is a clock".[106] The relationship with the audience is again hierarchical: the spectators are the boss who decides the working hours of the artist, in what seems like the office routine Kafka knew and detested, as it perverted what should have been a life made of writing. Keeping the comparison, Meyer shows how the lack of economic interest in him made him redundant and the audience forgets about him. Incapable of separating life and art, the artist dies because he has no audience: in his perversion, he needs to feed to audience with his suffering (literally: he buys breakfast for those who do a good job in assessing he does not eat secretly) if he wants to live. As a performer, he dies because no one watches him and as a spectator, innocent because he could not fit into the world that was feeding him, he dies because there is no one to watch.

Different perversions will be analysed in depth in the next chapters, but given that they affect Kafka's alter-ego, it is important to have an overview of his biography to the innocent spectatorship of what he perceived as a perverted world.

KAFKA'S PARENTS AND THE EARLY YEARS: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PERVERSION

No analysis of Kafka's work would be effective without first understanding his life. In the next sections I go through the most influential events in his biography and show how they affected his narrative. Particular attention is given to those events that caused Kafka's perspective on reality to favour outsiders, "others", the perverted, like the constant fear for his father and the relevance given to dreams.

For the analysis of Kafka's work and life I use a psychoanalytic approach, as it is common to do. Although not the only possible, this approach is the most appropriate when discussing something as intimate as the revelation of perversions and the way they are represented in artistic language, considering their unconscious nature. Even more significantly, a considerable part of Kafka's art is based on his own life, so much that his diaries and letters can, and will, be considered as part of the primary literature, in agreement with the already quoted Müller-Seidel.[107] Even Max Brod, in his role of Kafka's literary curator, was unsure if it was better to publish the *Letter to His Father* under the letters or under the literary works. Deleuze and Guattari[108] had no doubt to include Kafka's letters as a part of his literature; they make an exception for the diaries, but not because they are not part of the literature, but because they are "less an element of the machine than the element in which the machine functions".[109] If Kafka's literature is so connected to his personal life and speaks through symbols, which in psychoanalysis are one way to express someone's unconscious,[110] it seems reasonable to approach it as a way to see Kafka's irrational drives bypassing his defence mechanisms. A psychoanalytic reading does not mean that I try and describe Kafka's unconscious or give any sort of irrefutable interpretation of his behaviour. If we understand the social environment he lived in, his life and relationship with other people, especially within the family, it will become easier to understand the perversions we see in Kafka's fictional world, how they were originated and how could some of the symbols fit in a perverted world and its performance.

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[106] Ibid., 30.

[107] Müller-Seidel, *Franz Kafkas Brief an den Vater.*

[108] Deleuze and Guattari, *Franz Kafka: Towards a minor literature.*

[109] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari* (Hove: Psychology Press, 1989).

[110] The importance of symbols in psychoanalysis was one of the main topics of Freud literature and up to this day it has never been refuted. See for example Henrik Enckell, "Reflection in Psychoanalysis: On Symbols and Metaphors," *The International Journal Of Psychoanalysis* 91, no.5 (2010): 1093-1114.

Franz Kafka was born the 3rd June 1883 in Prague. The first of 6 children, he was the only male to survive childhood and was very attached to his three sisters, particularly Ottla, the youngest. His father Hermann, one of the main inspirations for characters in his writings, was a merchant whose business expanded considerably in the years. His mother, Julie Löwy, daughter of a wealthy retail merchant, came from a well-to-do background and her dowry allowed her husband to open his business. Kafka saw in her the origin of his hysteria and made a precise distinction between the two families: the paternal was strong and towering, in a word "masculine", while his mother's had the typical traits of femininity and Jewishness from the perspective of a 19th century society, including weakness and craziness. Talking about himself, Kafka described his behaviour as "a Löwy with a certain basis of Kafka, which, however, is not set in motion".[111] Hysteria was a common diagnosis for women of the era and female hysteria was a specific subcategory of the illness. So much, in fact, that the physician George Beads claimed, in the second half of the century, a quarter of all women suffered of it.[112]

Hermann Kafka was born and raised in a poor family in a small, "ghetto-like village community" (as defined by his son in the letter). As soon as he was able to leave, he did so and tried to integrate as much as possible in Prague society, thus being a good example of a Western Jew. He spoke Czech at home, like all Jews of his generation, but had to learn German, as compulsory education was taught in this language, even if he never mastered it in its written form. The education he gave to his children had very little to do with religion and even during pogroms that happened in Prague, his business was treated like that of a Czech person.[113] Hermann Kafka was an authoritative and strong presence, disappointed by the son, from Franz's perspective, and only rarely tender. The relationship with a father that will be remembered more for his prohibitive than his protective function and his rejection to the wedding between Franz and Julie Wohryzek brought Kafka to write in 1919 the *Letter to His Father*, which is the most useful source for a psychoanalytic approach to his relationship with the family. Here the author remembers only two instances during which he was able to see the tender side of his father and both are related to illnesses, showing how, from Kafka's perspective, tenderness was the exception, the perversion of an otherwise cold and unforgiving behaviour.

> The time Mother was gravely ill and you stood holding on to the bookcase, shaking with sobs; or when, during my last illness, you came tiptoeing to Ottla's room to see me, stopping in the doorway, craning your neck to see me, and out of consideration only waved to me with your hand.[114]

These acts of tenderness, though, cannot make up for everything else and it is not even really important if Hermann was actually the oppressive figure described by the son. What matters is the perception Kafka had of his father, even if he also admitted the application of some "lawyerly tricks"[115] in writing the letter.

If Hermann Kafka was one of the main inspirations for the fathers and authoritative figures in Franz's prose, Julie Löwy is surely one of the main ones for women and mothers. Her influence has often been underestimated, but she played an important role in influencing her son to the themes that would become important later in his life, like death and dying. Miller and Pawel show how she was passive and obedient, exposing her "frustrated aggression, anxieties and

[111] Franz Kafka, *Letter to his Father*, in *Wedding Preparations in the Country and other Posthumous Stories* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 159.

[112] George Beard, *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion* (New York: William Wood and Company, 1880).

[113] Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason*.

[114] Kafka, *Letter to his Father*, 175.

[115] Franz Kafka, *Letters to Milena* (New York: Schocken Books, 199), 63.

insecurities onto the child by subtle emotional (though not physical) violence".[116] This behaviour led to feelings of threat and isolation because of a possible unconscious perception she did not care enough to protect him from the father. Although no biographer considers this to be even remotely true, there is little doubt that she was not particularly present and active, considering how she left the children education to maids and servants.[117] This was typical in child upbringing in those years: parental care was often limited to instructions and orders at the dinner table, but in Kafka's case, this was the beginning of an emotional wound whose scar will be visible in the rest of his life. The most obvious influence in his literature will be the representation of a Law that needs formal adherence to a series of performances to be satisfied, instead of the understanding of the rules. Expanding on Wagenbach's thought, this experience can also be seen as the beginning of the process leading to Kafka's view of the world as an incomprehensible place whose laws can be perverted:

> Growing up in a parental home lacking in opinions, under mysterious laws and in incomprehensible surroundings, the child cut himself off from the outside world [...] It was these experiences of his own childhood that led Kafka [...] to advise his sister Elli to have her son educated in a boarding school. The unusually violent tone [...] shows how he is still affected by his past.[118]

Following the dictate of her time, Julie was a devout wife, always ready to show compassion and affection to her husband, listening to his complaints and never doubting that his frequent illnesses were actually real. When talking about the mother in the letter, Kafka said:" She loved you too much [...]; over the years, Mother became ever more closely tied to you [...]. As the years passed, she came to adopt your judgements and condemnations of the children ever more blindly and completely, a matter not so much of reason as of feelings".[119] *Mehr im Gefühl als im Verstand* is the closing original of the quote, stressing not so much, as the English translation suggests, that the matter at hand was about feelings rather than reason, but that the mother herself could not really understand her husband (*Verstand* indicates understanding, from the verb *verstehen*), but was too immersed in her feelings for him to disagree with every *Urteil und Vorurteil*, a subtle way to imply that Kafka's father was biased in his judgment. This and other remarks showing an oedipal jealousy towards the attentions received by the father and stressing how abusive and unloving he was, allow some room to think the letter was also meant to be read by his mother, who was asked to read and approve it, first. This is equally supported by the difference made between the father's strong and violent behaviour and the continuous remarks about the mother's kindness and protectiveness towards the child.

Although there is no direct claim to justify this, according to Pawel, Kafka was surely aware of the fact that, to cope with such a strong and stubborn husband, his mother had become talented with subterfuge. Pawel defines her as "skilled at evasive schemes, compromises and behind-the-scenes manipulations".[120] So talented, in fact, that in 1912, after being told by Franz's friend Max Brod her son was so overworked he was contemplating suicide, she made Hermann believe Franz was working for the family asbestos company while she had hired her son-in-law's brother to do the job Kafka was supposed to do. Probably aware of his mother's skills and unwilling to face his father about the topic, it wouldn't be so far-fetched to think that Kafka was actually hoping his mother would read the letter and, without giving it to her husband, would

[116] Scherr, *Maternal destructiveness in the life of Franz Kafka.*
[117] E. Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason.*
[118] K. Wagenbach, *Kafka*, 17.
[119] F. Kafka, *Letter to his Father*, 183.
[120] E. Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason*, 238.

have acted in Franz's favour to convince Hermann to change his negative mind about their son's engagement. There is little doubt Kafka was aware of his mother's ability, considering he saw her dealing every day with Hermann, and it is easy to see in her at least one of the sources for the manipulative but caring behaviour of women in Kafka's stories, as well as his dual approach of respect and suspicion towards them in real life. After all, regardless of the details, every psychoanalytic theory agrees in seeing in the mother the first example of womanhood in a child's life, thus shaping their future idea and model of women.[121]

Living his adult life in the first part of the 20th century, Kafka was exposed to the ideas of Freud, which, thanks again to his Diaries and Letters, we know he read consistently, even if he did not think highly of psychoanalysis and considered "the therapeutic part of psychoanalysis [to be] a helpless mistake".[122] Nonetheless, he tried to analyse his own dreams, following the Freudian method, even if he always stopped before the actual interpretation and only completed the first steps: recollection and association. Consistent with Freud's method, Kafka offered associations between certain components of the dream and events or objects in his life. What is missing is the analyst's knowledge of symbols to fill the gaps, in fact many clinical theories after Freud try to understand dreams based on elements outside of it.[123]

> The horrible apparition last night of a blind child, apparently the daughter of my aunt in Leitmeritz, who, however, has no daughter but only sons [...]. This blind or weak-sighted child had both eyes covered by a pair of glasses [...] In order that this eyeglass might be set in place with optical correctness it was necessary, instead of the usual support behind the ears, to make use of a lever, the head of which could be attached to no place but the cheekbone, so that from this lens a little rod descended to the cheek, there disappeared into the pierced flesh and ended on the bone, while another small wire came out and went back over the ear [...] I remembered that the glasses in the dream derive from my mother, who in the evening sits next to me and, while playing cards, looks across me not very pleasantly under her eyeglasses. Her glasses even have, which I do not remember having noticed before, the right lens nearer the eye than the left.
>
> A short time ago this dream: We were living on the Graben near the Café Continental. A regiment turned in from Herrengasse on its way to the railway station. My father:" That's something to look at as long as one can"; he swings himself up on the sill (in Felix's brown bathrobe, the figure in the dream was a mixture of the two) and with outstretched arms sprawls outside on the broad, sharply sloping window ledge. I catch hold of him by the two little loops through which the cord of his bathrobe passes [...] I think of how good it will be if I could fasten my feet by ropes to something solid so that my father could not pull me out. But to do that I should have to let go of my father, at least for a short time, and that's impossible. Sleep cannot withstand all this tension and I wake up.[124]

[121] For the development of ideas of masculinity and femininity, see Part 2 of Nancy J. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1999).

[122] F. Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 216.

[123] George Lakoff, "How metaphor structures dreams: The theory of conceptual metaphor applied to dream analysis," *Dreaming* 3, no.2 (1993): 77-98.

[124] Max Brod, ed., *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-1923* (New York: Penguins, 1964). Quotes from 02/10/1911 and 19/04/1916, respectively.

June Leavitt suggests the complicated lever of the first dream to represent male genitals and the child's sight loss to mean the fear of castration. The second dream does not offer any association, even if it is easy to see a perverted perception of the father as someone to depend from, but also the source of destruction.[125] As I show in the next section, Hermann Kafka was for his son the standard to imitate, but also the unforgiving punisher of every failure.

KAFKA'S FATHER AS A STANDARD

The dependence and spite for his father is visible in several aspects of Kafka's life and narrative. Kafka would have liked to be more knowledgeable about Judaism and blamed his father for not teaching him enough. He saw him as a capable seller, strong in his decisions and nice with customers but unfair and severe when dictating rules in the family. As repeated more than once in the *Letter to His Father*, Kafka saw his father as an imposing man with a healthy constitution, while he was weak, slim and constantly sick. Kafka's view about himself is a clear example of perversion: he compares himself to his father, the standard, and every deviation from him is a perversion to be ashamed of.

> I was, after all, weighed down by your mere physical presence. I remember, for instance, how we often undressed in the same bathing hut. There was I, skinny, weakly, slight; you strong, tall, broad. Even inside the hut I felt a miserable specimen, and what's more, not only in your eyes but in the eyes of the whole world, for you were for me the measure of all things. But then when we stepped out of the bathing hut before the people, you holding me by my hand, a little skeleton, unsteady, barefoot on the boards, frightened of the water, incapable of copying your swimming strokes, which you, with the best of intentions, but actually to my profound humiliation, kept on demonstrating [...]. I felt best when you sometimes undressed first and I was able to stay behind in the hut alone and put off the disgrace of showing myself in public until at last you came to see what I was doing and drove me out of the hut. I was grateful to you for not seeming to notice my anguish, and besides, I was proud of my father's body. By the way, this difference between us remains much the same to this very day.[126]

It is almost impossible to label with certainty a relationship between a father and a son, when they have both been dead for almost one century and the only remaining documentation has probably been at least partially filtered. However, the *Letter to His Father* contains several information suggesting the feelings Kafka had about his father, confirmed by the fatherly characters in his stories. Kafka's idolization of his father as a powerful, knowledgeable and strong individual apparently clashes with the description of a despot, a ruler who doesn't need to follow his own arbitrary rules, but it is in fact typical of the father complex, one of the aspects of the Oedipus complex.[127] A complex that Kafka never resolved and felt incapable to win, as showed in *The Metamorphosis*, where the father finds new life in the son's misfortune and contributes to his son's moral and physical death. The father of *The Judgment* fools his son into believing in his sickness just to prove his power over him by stealing his friend and condemning him to death. Even Karl Rossman in *The Stoker* (which will later become the first chapter of the unfinished novel *Amerika*) is not considered worthy of becoming a father and is sent by his parents to

[125] June O. Leavitt, *The Mystical life of Franz Kafka* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
[126] Kafka, *Letter to his Father*, 180.
[127] Jon E. Roeckelein, *Elsevier's Dictionary of Psychological Theories* (New York: Elsevier Science, 2006), 111.

America after impregnating a woman. Kafka's way to say he is unworthy to take the role of a father.

Feeling communication with his father as impossible, Kafka recognized in his father the cause of his own isolation from the world and in one significant passage of the letter describes not only his and his father's worlds as being completely separated, but both of them divided by that of everyone else. In this passage, Kafka is essentially describing how his life feels perverted, excluded as he is from other people because of the world in which only his father lives:

> Hence the world was for me divided into three parts: one in which I, the slave, lived under laws that had been invented only for me and which I could, I did not know why, never completely comply with; then a second world, which was infinitely remote from mine, in which you lived, concerned with government [*Regierung* in the original, suggesting a government with absolute power], with the issuing of orders and with the annoyance about their not being obeyed; and finally a third world where everybody else lived happily and free from orders and from having to obey.[128]

The lucid and almost scientific language used by Kafka in the *Letter to His Father* may however denote a sort of a victory of the conflict, a display of superiority finally reached not through a physical confrontation, but through an intellectual one. It is almost an attempt to fix a perverted behaviour through a rational action. The letter starts with Kafka trying to answer a question his father asked some time before: why was Kafka afraid of him? With his calm, clear language, Kafka seems to be facing his fear and to be explaining in a perfect display of psychoanalytic understanding where his fears originate from. It is not possible to know if, as suggested before, the letter was mainly intended to diminish the father to the eyes of the mother, or if Kafka would have really wanted the father to read it, or if the first was the unconscious goal masked with the latter. Whatever the truth, the letter seems to be an attempt to confront the rival in the Oedipal conflict.

Kafka's struggle between his childish view of the father as an omnipotent figure and the adverse feelings towards him is well depicted by Ernst Pawel:

> Even Kafka himself had no trouble discerning the Freudian triad and linking the resumption of oedipal hostilities to the clash over his intended marriage. [...] For the squalling brat still being brutalized by an all-powerful father was also an incorruptibly lucid adult gifted with more than his share of reason and insight who –as the letter itself amply demonstrates- saw Hermann as a weak bully whose very obsession with money and status was nothing but the ghetto fear of poverty and humiliation. [...] Hermann's real question, which remains unanswered along with the rhetorical one, was "How can *you* be afraid of me, when I am afraid of you?" [...] At one extreme stood the pathetic figure of Hermann himself, and about the kindest thing his son could find to say about him was that he, too, was a victim [...] At the other extreme loomed the one whom this letter was addressed, omniscient, omnipotent, but looking suspiciously like Hermann Kafka on an off day and acting with the same capricious malevolence. A very Jewish God.[129]

[128] Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 168.
[129] Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason*, 384-385.

KAFKA'S UNIVERSITY YEARS: SEX PERVERSION

In this section, I discuss the role of sex and sexuality in Kafka's life. Although sexual perversions have been discussed by several critics, I intend to show Kafka's troubled relation with sexuality started in the family and school environment. I argue here, and discuss more extensively in the next chapter, that sexual perversion is behind every other perversions.

Despite his "terror of the school",[130] Kafka's grades were more than average and, following his father's request, he went to university to study law. This choice was not made out of genuine interest, as proved by the fact that he kept attending social groups about literature and German studies. However, law and medicine were the only two faculties allowing unconverted Jews to work as freelancers or to aspire to decent, although almost never high, positions in offices.

Hugo Bergmann, one of Kafka's school friends, said:

> In those days, the situation was such that a Jewish graduate, unless he accepted baptism in order to enter government service, had in fact no other choice but law or medicine, the two professions that offered self-employment. Since these did not interest either Kafka or myself, we looked around for other possibilities.[131]

During the university years, Kafka met another of his most important friends, Oskar Pollack, with whom he had a constant and interesting correspondence hinting to, among other things, Kafka's troubled sexuality. In the last years of university, however, their friendship waned. In 1902 Kafka had met Max Brod, his friend for life and posthumous literary curator, during a meeting of the Section of Literature and Art, where the two had an argument about Nietzsche, who Kafka admired and Brod considered a fraud.

In the 19th century, the University of Prague was going through a series of changes in its organisation: the religious limitations upon degrees and positions were being removed, but the national condition was felt as an issue by the Czech majority of the Bohemian people, who were developing a national consciousness. As a result, several professorships in Czech started being founded and in 1863, 22 out of 187 were in this language. In the following years the number increased until, in 1882, a law was made to separate the German and the Czech faculties into two independent academic authorities and institutions. These changes and national feelings, though, only contributed to the rivalry between the two groups and damaged the quality of the teachings. As a German speaker Czech, the rivalry only contributed to Kafka's feeling of isolation and lack of belonging. Furthermore, the German law school was a place more interested in creating bureaucrats than professional lawyers.[132] As already mentioned in Bergmann's quote, Kafka was not interested in law, but in a person as sensitive and prone to shame and depression as Kafka, boredom is akin to torture. It's not a coincidence if his first, disgusting (as he himself described it) sexual experience shares the same description of the Roman law he was studying just before approaching the girl.

> I was constantly pacing back and forth in my room upstairs [...] nervously preparing for the first State examination, trying to cram facts that made no sense to me into my head. [...] I kept stopping in front of the window, my mouth full of disgusting Roman law [...] It was all enticing, exciting, and disgusting, [...] this happiness was only because my eternally grieving body had given me some peace at last, and above all

[130] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 213.

[131] Hugo Bergmann, *Faith and Reason,* (New York: Schocken, 1961). Quoted in Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason*, 104.

[132] Teich, *Bohemia in History*.

> because the whole thing had not been more disgusting, more dirty than it was.[133]

Pawel goes as far as saying that this encounter was driven by reckless despair and the risk of syphilis and death must have seemed vastly preferable to slow suffocation by Roman law.[134] This seems a bit far-fetched, especially considering Pawel said just a few pages before that "His [Kafka's] visceral disgust for the physical aspects of sex may have somewhat delayed his sexual initiation, [...] but by the time he was twenty, in 1903, sexual needs, fears, guilt, confusion and curiosity combined to propel him into his first adventure".[135] Youth compulsions, peer pressure and desire seem to be a more likely explanation for this experience, but it would also be unfair to ignore the extensive description of what and how he was studying in a part of a letter describing a disgusting part of his life. So disgusting and at the same time needed, in fact, that only a few lines later he expresses anger towards the girl and what she did:

> I never spoke to her again, she had become (from my point of view) my evil enemy, although in reality she was friendly and good-natured. [...] And although the girl had done something slightly disgusting in the hotel (not worth mentioning), had said something slightly obscene (not worth mentioning), I don't mean to say this was the sole reason for my animosity (in fact, I'm sure it wasn't); nonetheless the memory remained. I knew [...] this disgust and filth were a necessary part of the whole. [...] My body, often quiet for years, would then again be shaken by this longing for some very particular, trivial, disgusting thing, something slightly repulsive, embarrassing, obscene, which I always found even in the best cases.[136]

Whatever the reason, it seems here clear that sexuality was one of the fields making him an outcast, whose difficult approach to intimate acts, as well as the desire to break strict boundaries could have led to perversions.[137]

Although the connection between sex and perversion is not always so clear, quoting Friedländer, "the issues torturing Kafka most of his life were of a sexual nature".[138] In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud suggested that sexual libido finds different ways to manifest itself as we grow up, given that sexual displays are considered inappropriate. Kafka's unhealthy relationship with sex and sexuality found a way to be manifested in his art, a sublimation that Freud considered healthy, and originated the perverted depictions of reality that I am discussing in this thesis. Elizabeth Boa shows another paradox while commenting Kafka's treatment of women, focusing on the sometimes sweet and sometimes paranoid and obsessive, almost abusive letters to Felice: by escaping from a world of real gendered social relations, he felt granted an immense and arbitrary power over women. Not only the way Kafka would have liked Felice to be was mirrored by the submissive character Frieda in *The Castle*, but Milena was called "mother Milena" in the letters, while he was a long-distance father.[139] These epithets between himself and his lover seems to confirm again what said earlier about Kafka's need for security and confidence to be found within the family. His sexuality seems again to have been affected by

[133] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 146.
[134] E. Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason.*
[135] E. Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason,* 84.
[136] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 147.
[137] Otto F. Kernberg, "Sadomasochism, Sexual excitement and Perversion," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 39, no.2 (1991): 195-211.
[138] Friedländer, *Franz Kafka: the Poet of Shame and Guilt*, 102.
[139] Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race.*

his family and to have never fully developed to a mature stage, bringing a plethora of perversions with it. One of Kafka's letters to Felice shows how the repulsion for sex originated also in the home environment; "The sight of the double bed at home, the rumpled sheets, the nightgowns carefully laid out, can almost make me want to vomit, can turn me inside out as though my birth had not been final".[140]

If usually "at an early stage sex is associated with the idea of violating ones' natural fastidiousness, the desire not to be touched, the dislike for dirt and alien flesh",[141] for Kafka this repulsion lasted for his whole life. Nonetheless, he visited brothels and had several flirtations, although this probably had more to do with the culture of his time than with an actual interest in the sexual act itself. Kafka's idea of relationships was more romantic and chaste in nature: in his biography, Brod said that Kafka had the highest conception about marriage and this is confirmed in several instances. For example, throughout the *Letter to His Father*, marriage and purity are almost synonyms even when referring to the father as a married, and therefore pure, man. In the same letter, there are two parallel moments in which the presence of sex in marriage disturbs Kafka. The first is in Kafka's recollection of himself as a teenager wanting to show the father he knew about sex and receiving as a reply the suggestions of "the filthiest thing possible".[142] The second memory is contemporary to the writing of the letter: commenting his son's wish to marry, Hermann makes a sexual reference that Kafka interprets as "the most abominable, crude and ridiculous thing possible" (208-209. Receiving suggestions about sex from a married man, even his father, is for Kafka unthinkable and disgusting, because sex is the perversion of marriage, or, to say it in Kafka's own words, "coitus is the punishment for intimacy, for being together".[143]

Starting from a perverted view of sex, all of the other perversions develop or are influenced by it: when it comes to the perversion of humanity, the ape of *A Report to an Academy* is an exhibitionist, ready to take his trousers off in front of every visitors; the big books of codes that in an unperverted society dominate courtrooms and legal offices are replaced with pornographic books in the courtroom of *The Trial*, where judges and audience interrupt hearings to enjoy watching the rape of a woman, just to further confirm that laws and bureaucrats are perverted. Georg Bendemann, the protagonist of *The Judgment*, commits suicide to execute the perverted sentence inflicted upon him for no apparent reason by throwing himself from a bridge over which an almost unending stream of traffic is going. In his biography of Kafka, Max Brod reports Kafka confessing him that, while writing that scene, he was thinking of a "violent ejaculation".[144]

Sexuality is very often present in these and other examples of perversions, either as a cause, a consequence or a relevant element, making it and its perversions a valid starting point to understand the origin and development of every perversion. However, it is important to notice that not every perversion is so clearly marked by sexual elements, but all of them are determined by the presence of arbitrary standards determined by a superior Law describing them as objective justice.

ADULT AGE – WORK AND THE PERVERSION OF JUSTICE

Kafka is best known for the perversion of justice and laws in works such as *The Trial*, *The Judgment*, *Before the Law* and *In the Penal Colony*. The most known aspects of this perversion are the unclear laws that only some people know how to manipulate, the intricate bureaucracy and the presence of authority figures who are allowed to abuse those inferior to them. A deeper case for this perversion will be made in the last chapter of this thesis. In this

[140] Franz Kafka, *Letters to Felice* (New York: Schocken, 1967). Letter dated 19/09/1916.
[141] Colin Wilson, *Sexuality and Identity* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963).
[142] Kafka, *Letter to his Father*, 206.
[143] Kafka, *Diaries*, entry dated 13/8/1913.
[144] Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography* (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), 129.

section, however, I show the biographic reasons for the perception of perverted justice and Law by discussing the adult years of Kafka's life and his relationship with authority.

The clearest example of this kind of perversion is, as I will discuss in depth in the last chapter, *The Trial* and the embedded parable *Before the Law*, that includes all the elements characterizing how the justice system works in Kafka's world. It is so important that, in his adaptation from the novel, Orson Welles opens the film with it to give viewers the key to interpret what they were about to see. In the more recent adaptation of 1993, Harold Pinter leaves it in its place in the story, but David Jones introduces the character narrating it, a priest, with a flamboyant, theatrical entry and the role is played by the most known actor of the cast, Anthony Hopkins, to underline the importance of the story.

Kafka's father was already a frightening figure who imposed laws he himself did not feel obliged to follow, but it was during school that Kafka had the first contact with authority figures outside of the family, both inside and outside the school. The reaction to them was at an embryonic stage, if compared to that in his later years, but it already showed an obvious sense of inferiority, shame and powerlessness in front of their arbitrary behaviours and law-making powers.

> Our cook [...] took me to school every morning. [...] And every morning for about a year, the same scene was replayed: As we left the house the cook would threaten me to tell the teacher how naughty I had been at home. Now while I probably wasn't very naughty, I was in fact spiteful, lazy, sad, bad-tempered, from all which no doubt something suitably nasty could have been concocted for the benefit of the teacher [...]. I felt that the road to school was, after all, enormous, that a lot could happen along the way [...]. I still had serious doubts whether the cook, an authority figure of merely the home-grown variety, would dare to address an authority figure such as the teacher, who commanded the respect of the whole world. [...] Somewhere around the Meatmarket Lane, fear finally gained the upper hand [...] School was in and of itself a horror and now the cook was trying to make it even worse.
>
> I began to plead, she shook her head [...] I threatened her with retaliation by my parents, which made her laugh: here she was all-powerful. [...] She never told. But she always could have; in fact, the probability seemed to increase every day (yesterday I didn't tell, but today I am definitely going to) and this threat she never relinquished.[145]

The cook and the teacher denote a hierarchy of power and Kafka is afraid of all of them, while at the same time they are all afraid of their superior. These lines show how Kafka was educated not to respect, but to fear authority, as its representatives are allowed, in his view, to act and lie however they please. The powerful cook, immune to Kafka's pleas, but also not as authoritative as the teacher, reminds of the warden of the Law in *Before the Law*, the fear of whom makes it impossible for the countryman to access the Law, but who is unable to even look in the eyes of the third guardian.

The situation was not much better in school: contacts between teachers and pupils were close to impossible, given the atmosphere of carelessness towards individuality in favour of a system promoting a standardized learning to be taught through intimidation and with the sole goal to prepare bureaucrats. The authority was distant and impossible to see, but somehow provided every detail about the lesson plans, reading material and, above all, disciplinary procedures. The teachers were more powerful than the students, but they remained nothing

[145] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 53-54.

more than the lowest echelon of a mysterious bureaucracy. It is easy to understand how, under this pressure and in this system, Kafka's whole perception of life and the self was perverted. During these years, his state of apprehension became constant and he started perfecting "the art of 'disappearing' [...], vanishing behind that 'glass wall' which all those who knew him eventually ran up against".[146] Most of Kafka's memories about these years had to do with fear of those with power and the constant apprehension of failure by being judged as inadequate by a system he could not understand and that he understood even less when he was not considered a failure.

> Never, I thought, should I pass out of the first class at elementary school, but I succeeded, I even got a prize; but I should certainly not pass the entrance exam for the *Gymnasium*, yet I succeeded in that [...] What this produced, however, was not confidence, on the contrary, I was always convinced [...] that the more things I was successful in, the worse the final outcome would inevitably be. Often in my mind's eye I would see an assembly of the masters [...] meeting in order to examine this unique, outrageous case, to discover how I, the most incapable and in any case the most ignorant of all, had succeeded in creeping up as far as this class [...]. Living with such fantasies is not easy for a child. [...] That was how small and far-away everything was in comparison to the main thing.[147]

After graduating with average results and almost failing the final tests, another sign of his lack of interest, he worked as a court intern for one year, but not much is known about that year, apart from the fact that he considered himself to have "accomplished nothing at all".[148] In 1906, he started working for the *Assicurazioni Generali di Trieste* and in 1908 changed employer, working for the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute, where he remained until his early retirement in 1922. As a lawyer employed for an insurance institute where he had to deal with legislation and quibbles, Kafka was well aware of the intricacies and subtleties of the law, as well as of the people who administer it, but he never stopped thinking about them as an incomprehensible trap made out of arbitrary rules.

The job for the *Assicurazioni Generali* was Kafka's first contact with a world outside of study and writing and, after a first impression made of optimism and a positive reaction to the challenge of learning Italian, the routine, the strict regulations and the long, stressful working hours started to feel unbearable:

> The nicest thing would be a transfer out of the company altogether, which is not entirely impossible. What I resent is not the work as such so much as the indolence of swampy time. The office hours, you know, are indivisible; even during the last half hour one feels the pressure of the preceding eight as keenly as during the first one [...] I felt déclassé.[149]

Worst of all, he had to cram his daily living into six hours and this included his writing:" this horrible occupation of which I am now deprived, and whose loss is my whole misfortune".[150]

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[146] Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason*, 53.
[147] Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 200-201.
[148] Max Brod, ed. *Letters to friends, Family and Editors*, (New York: Schocken, 1977), 31.
[149] Brod, *Letters to friends, Family and Editors*, Letter written on October 8, 1907.
[150] Ibid.

Employees at the *Assicurazioni Generali* were treated like mere cogs in a machine and had barely any right to vacation days –and even then, only after their second year in the organization, in addition to mandatory unpaid overtime and dehumanization. In the letters to his friends and family some of the images of the later narrative start to appear: Kafka felt like a wild beast, powerlessness was a recurring topic and several allusions to suicide appeared in various forms. Although his superior was a more understanding person, at least enough for the two to keep in touch even after Kafka left the job, the higher powers resembled the authority figures Kafka had already met in school. This mechanism caused in Kafka the perception of people as instruments without identity, used for an unknowable goal. Their humanity is perverted, their identity is lost and they start to interpret the role required by a system. Andrea Battistini understood this phenomenon and represented it in his theatre adaptation of *The Trial*, where the perverted dehumanization demanded by the justice system is only understood by one person who tries to go against it. To represent it, every actor of the play, apart from the protagonist, wears a blank half-mask, thus making them very similar to mannequins, regardless of their role and status.

The depression and feelings of impotence that Kafka felt while in this role are also suggested by the lack of any written work, with the exception of one book review, between September 1907 and September 1909.

When Kafka finally changed jobs, his working hours changed, allowing him more time to follow a routine he found more suitable: being free to go at 2p.m., he had the chance to go home, sleep until dinner and write during the first hours of the morning, when his house, too small and noisy for his family and servants, was finally quiet. In the new job he wrote several articles of a technical nature and even wrote some sections of an important report dealing with accident preventions. His superiors recognized and praised his ability to understand abstruse details and present them clearly with what was defined as an "exceptional faculty for conceptualization".[151]

Understanding intricate and abstract ideas is the best way to represent and distort them and this is how Kafka's perversion of justice develops. In the law governing a non-perverted world, justice is made of precise rules and laws and the whole jurisdictional system is divided into roles with duties and competencies, so that every person has the right to know who to speak to and what they are entitled to. The perversion of the system exemplified in *The Trial* is clear when we realize the main character is not even fighting against any specific law or situation. His struggles are against a vague accusation of something he does not even try to understand, he tries to oppose regulations he is not entitled to understand and that have nothing to do with the "real" Law. Kafka's characters are already condemned and the court is manipulated by the human representation of the system, in which decisions are already taken and there is no hope of acquittal, but only of postponing. However, not even this can be done in an official way. The power to influence the representatives is in the hands of people like ushers, priests and the painter who paints the judges; they talk more intimately to the judges and the accused person's life depends on their recommendation. All of the characters dealing with Josef have some form of perversion. The main women are sexually attracted by accused men as if they were a fetish and one of them, Leni, has even a weird, animal-like mutation on her hand, indicating her perverted nature. The lawyer Huld is constantly sick and enjoys to psychologically torture his clients. The judges allow their personal sexual urges to influence what is supposed to be their objective job by basing their knowledge of the law on books that are full of obscene photographs. The other accused people met by K. have accepted the way justice works and allowed it to pervert their humanity into a form of sadomasochistic and passive acceptance of everything, as exemplified by the servitude expressed by Bloch, Huld's other client.

[151] Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason,* 186.

Kafka's use and perversion of justice will be discussed more in detail later, but it was important to understand Kafka's perspective about authority and laws in order to approach another key theme of Kafka's adult life: his relationship with his Jewish origin.

ADULTHOOD – JEWISHNESS

In this section, I talk about Kafka's relationship with Jewishness and its effects on his life and narrative. I discuss the situation of Jews in Kafka's society and show how sickness, a normal condition in Kafka's characters, is a perversion, being the opposite of what is expected from a person on average, but also an effective metaphor for outcasts and, if interpreted religiously, Jews.

Considering the historical period, it is not surprising that anti-Semitic literature of the time was already portraying Jews as being different: in his collection of proverbs published in the anti-Semitic propaganda journal *Der Stürmer,* the anti-Semitic writer Ernst Hiemer quotes the saying: "He walks like a Jew. He has flat feet like a Jew. God Protect us from trichinosis and Jew's noses."[152] Kafka's Prague was already divided in itself. The rivalry between Germans and Czech, that also brought to violent attacks like the burning of the Czech theatre built specifically to tower over the German theatres, was similar to that between Jewish, who were mostly German speakers, and non-Jewish groups. The feeling of national identity and the requests for rights and recognition of the Jewish groups were countered by a rising antisemitism.[153] This sentiment was further ignited by the perception of the loss of "Bohemism", a pre-1848 ideology claiming the superiority of Bohemia over the German-speaking people, affected by cultural, but also geographical issues, as Bohemia had become, at least linguistically, part of Germany.[154]This identity conflict was reflected by several writers belonging to the Prague Circles Kafka was also a member of, as they mostly gathered German-speaking Jewish writers. Kafka's first contact with an embryonic form of Zionism was during high school thanks to his friend Hugo Bergmann, with whom he had several debates that he remembered at the end of 1911:

> I remember, for instance, how in high school I often [...] used to argue with Bergmann about God and His existence in a Talmudic manner either borrowed from him or discovered within myself. At the time I liked to enlarge on a theme I had come across in a Christian magazine [...] which compared a clock and the world to God and a watchmaker [...]. One such argument took place as we kept walking around the Town Hall tower.[155]

Bergmann would become in the following years, and before Kafka, one of the strongest promoters of Jewish independence, supporting the nationalistic desire of Czech Jews to be recognized as a nationality and eventually travelling to Galicia, where he would meet what he considered the real Jewish blood. In these years, the Czech Jewish nationalist movements were starting to demand independence and recognition, moved by the questions of thinkers like Martin Buber, who were wondering what does it mean to be Jew. This question would be raised several times in different forms throughout the following decades, referred to as the *Judenfrage*, posing the question of what makes a Jew into a Jew. Even if he was incapable to answer the question, as his literature shows, Kafka's relationship to religion did not change substantially in the years, even if he clearly realized the difference between the Jewish religion and the Jewish culture. Kafka was never particularly religious and, agreeing with Pawel, I consider the suggestion

[152] Ernst Hiemer, *Der Jude im Sprichwort der Voelker* (Nürnberg: Der Stürmer Bücherverlag, 1942).

[153] Gary B.Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (New York: Princeton, 1981).

[154] Pieter Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: German-Liberal Politics and Rhetoric in the Austrian Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

[155] Kafka, *Diaries*, 205.

that Kafka converted to Judaism "a daring leap back into banality".[156] It is certainly true that he was inspired in his stories by what in modern times we would call "spiritual", a vague term that cannot be easily defined mostly because it refers to a vague, not better defined pull to religious and metaphysical ideas. However, he never fully converted to Judaism: the confusion probably derives from the misunderstanding of Judaism as culture and Judaism as religion. Kafka always remained in a Jewish environment and most of his friends were Jewish, but at the same time was aware of his lack of understanding and blamed his father for not educating him more about Jewish traditions:

> It was also impossible to make a child, overacutely observant from sheer nervousness, understand that the few flimsy gestures you performed in the name of Judaism, and with an indifference in keeping with their flimsiness, could have any higher meaning. For you they had meaning as little souvenirs of earlier times, and that was why you wanted to pass them on to me, but since they no longer had any intrinsic value even you could do this only through persuasion or threat; on the one hand, this could not be successful, and on the other, it had to make you very angry with me on account of my apparent obstinacy, since you did not recognize the weakness of your position in this.[157]

In 1912, Kafka met for the first time Felice Bauer, a cousin of Max Brod, and after just a few months he started with her a correspondence that lasted five years, during which they got engaged twice and never married. Felice also came from a Jewish background and, for this reason, was the only relationship that Hermann Kafka accepted for his son. According to the standards of the time, Felice was an unusually strong and independent woman and Kafka was so interested in her beliefs that asked her about her relationship with God, trying to understand if that idea made her happy, but in a tone suggesting he was aware that God may was probably a delusion, even if a useful one.

> What is it that substains you? The idea of Jewishness or the idea of God? Do you feel –and this is the essential point- an unbroken tie between yourself and some reassuringly distant, possibly infinite, heights and depths?[158]

The interest originated in 1911, when Kafka came in contact with Eastern European Jewishness thanks to Yizchak Löwy, the main actor of a Yiddish theatre company whose performances fascinated Kafka and opened him the world of Jewishness as he had never seen it. Eastern European Jews were considered a purer kind of Jew, one of those whose blood had not been too diluted, as Bergmann mentioned in his trip to Galicia. The Zionist newspaper *Selbstwehr* published articles of Jewish groups coming from the East and their way of life in order to promote an identification with the East.[159] The acting company's performances were also inspired by this way of life and they fascinated Kafka so much that he actively tried to help the ensemble with the organization of a special evening of readings, songs and recitations by Löwy on the 18th February 1912, of which Kafka gave an introductory lecture, the so-called *Speech on*

[156] Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason.*
[157] Kafka, *Letter to his Father*, 194.
[158] F. Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, letter dated 09/02/1913.
[159] Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflicts and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka Fin-de-Siecle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

the Yiddish Language containing some of his thoughts about Judaism and the importance of a shared culture expressed through language, as well as his role as a German writer.

> I would like to assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that you understand far more jargon [*jargon* in the original, the common way to refer to Yiddish] than you think [...] You will be already quite close to Yiddish if you realize that, active within you, in addition to knowledge, are forces and junctures of forces enabling you to feel yourselves into an understanding of Yiddish [...] Yiddish is everything: word, Hasidic melody and the very essence of this Easter Jewish actor himself [...] You will so powerfully feel the true unity of Yiddish as to make you afraid – not of Yiddish any longer, but of yourselves.[160]

Kafka's use of the otherwise derogatory word "jargon" to refer to Yiddisch mirrors the difference in language and accent that was typical of the Eastern Jews and that Bergmann, too, points out like a childish mistake. At the same time, together with the traditions and superstitions of the Eastern groups, language was considered a distinctive mark of pride to show to be purely Jew.[161] In the following years and even after having stopped seeing the actor, Kafka became more and more interested in studying Jewish traditions and language and even considered the idea of moving to Palestine with his last lover Dora Dymant.[162]

It is complicated to define Kafka's real thoughts about Zionism, though: if his writings started to reflect and be influenced by the Jewish culture and Zionist themes, in a 1916 letter to Felice there is an undeniable generic good opinion about the ideals, but never a feeling of belonging. To him, the Eastern Jews were a people and, watching a group of Russian Jewish emigrants transiting through Prague during the war, he admitted "If someone had told me last night I could be whatever I wanted, I would have chosen to be a small Jewish boy from the East standing there in the corner, without a trace of worry".[163] In an entry of the 24th October 1911, Kafka suggests that even German as a language can be an emotional limitation when compared to the Jewish potential:

> Yesterday it occurred to me that if I didn't always love my mother as much as she deserved and as I am capable of loving, it was the German language that kept me from it. The Jewish mother is no *Mutter* [...] it unconsciously contains Christian chill along with Christian splendour. The Jewish woman referred to as *Mutter* becomes not only comical, but a stranger as well. I believe that only the memories of the ghetto are what still preserves the Jewish family, for even the word *Vater* is far from signifying the Jewish father.[164]

The newly found love for Judaism brought an interest in the Jewish culture, but this also meant coming in touch with the propaganda representation of Jewish people as sick, animals and unworthy of the same treatment as other people. Jewishness was considered by society as the source of perversion.

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[160] Iris Bruce, *Kafka and Cultural Zionism: Dates in Palestine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 47.

[161] Spector, *Prague Territories.*

[162] Kathi Diamant, *Kafka's Last Lover: The Mystery of Dora Diamant* (New York: Basic Book, 2008).

[163] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 190.

[164] Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1923*, entry of 24/11/1911.

JEWS AS OUTCAST ANIMALS

The use of animals in Kafka's literature as a representation of the perversion of humanity will be discussed more in detail in chapter four. However here I argue an origin of that symbolism. I show how Kafka was surrounded by the representation of Jews as perverted because animals in a world of humans and, as such, weaker and submitted to them.

Such an interpretation is explicitly proposed by Kafka: in an already mentioned letter to Milena, he describes Jews as constantly wandering in a world that does not belong to them, using sex, something he found equally repulsive, as a comparison: "[The urge for sex] had something of the eternal Jew-senselessly being drawn along, senselessly wandering through a senselessly obscene world".[165]

The Anti-Semitic propaganda commonly showed Jews as animals, usually dogs and mice,[166] but a similar idea was used by Zionist supporters, who, in a similar fashion, saw Jews as members of a different race and advocated for their integration with non-Jews, as if members of another race. Around the beginning of the 20th century, the European Jewish society started being influenced by Max Nordau's speech at the Second Zionist Concert held in Basel in 1898, during which he advocated the need for a "New Judaism", with the possibility to reach the goals of Zionism through mental and, above all, physical power. This new trend was called "Muskeljudentum" (Muscular Judaism). Promoting a muscular, athletic Jew, Max Nordau was hoping to get rid of the stereotype of the weak Jew, so common among most cultures. He was also advocating for a reformation of the Jewish political body in order to rebuild a nation. After showing the situation of Jews in Europe during the First Zionist Congress and showing how the Western Jews were leaving their culture, in the Second Congress he wanted to awaken Jewish life through Zionism "morally through the rejuvenation of the ideals of the Volk and corporeally through the physical rearing of one's offspring, in order to create a lost muscular Judaism once again".[167] Nordau kept the comparison between Jews and creatures of different species to indicate the belonging to a different, parasitic and potentially dangerous race. The fact that even a speech meant to awaken active responsibility and integration maintained such a comparison, shows how the idea of belonging to different races was integrated in the culture of the time:

> It is a great sin to let a people degenerate in mental and physical need [...] it is a sin to the work of civilized society, and the Jewish people could and would gladly be energetic partners. [...] Microbiology teaches us that microorganisms that are harmless as long as they are living in open-air turn into terrible, disease-causing pathogens if one deprives them of oxygen and, to use the technical language, transforms them into anaerobes. Governments and peoples had better beware of making Jews into anaerobic being. They could have a high price to pay, regardless of what they do, to get rid of these Jews who they turned into pests by their own guilt.
>
> [...] Let's go! Pull your courage together! Do something! Work for yourself and make a place for your people under the sun! Don't rest until you have convinced the indifferent and downright hostile world that your people have a right to live and enjoy life just like other peoples.[168]

[165] Kafka, *Letters to Milena,*147.

[166] Randall L. Bytwerk, "The Argument for Genocide in Nazi Propaganda," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no.1 (2005): 37-62.

[167] *Stenographisches Protokoll der Verhandlungen des II. Zionisten-Congresses (Basel, August 28–31, 1898),* Verlag des Vereines 'Erez Israel', 1898. Translation by T. S. Presner.

[168] Ibid.

Nordau clarifies that it is "they" who turned Jews into pests and that if Jews became "anaerobic being", it would be up for "governments and peoples". What he was implying was that Jews wanted to be, and should have been, considered part of the community and did not put themselves in the situation they were in.

After coming in touch with Zionism, Kafka began writing a long list of works in which the characters are not humans and the performances of the two groups contrast each other. In fact, as will be further explored in chapter four and five, animals who have no human influence act free, do not have standards and therefore do not even have the concept of perversion. Humans, on the contrary, are perverted because they set standards that demand specific performances, the failure of which determines perversion. *The Metamorphosis* was written in 1912 and, although it would be a stretch to think the insect represents Jewishness, the influence of the propaganda and the idea of a race able to understand the other, but not vice versa, is visible. *A Report to an Academy* and *Jackal and Arabs*, arguably the stories that most clearly refer to, respectively, exclusion and the Jewish race, are dated 1917 and the topic remained one of Kafka's favourite until the end. Two of the other major animal stories with likely references to the Jewish situation, *Investigations of a Dog* and *Josephine the Singer or the Mouse Folk*, were written in 1922 and 1924, the year of Kafka's death.

The animal stories are the ones in which the grotesque is most evocatively expressed[169] and the perversion of humanity into another race is clear. The scientific approach used by the dog in *Investigations of a Dog* is very human and rational, but his motives are not understood neither by humans nor by his fellow dogs. Similarly, human and perverted is the situation in which animals try to kill the humans they claim to be oppressed by, but they need another human to be the executioner (*Jackals and Arabs*). In all of these situations, the central idea is the impossibility for the two races to co-exist as equals and the non-human is always the weakest. This does not mean that animals are always a metaphor for Jews, but that the animal representation of Jewishness influenced Kafka enough to represent animals as the "other", the perverted that requires to adapt to the standard. The dominion of humans, whose Law sets the standards and therefore feel and act as superior over the standard-free animals, is achieved also through a parallel discourse of strength and health, which affected Kafka to his death.

THE LAST YEARS – ILLNESS AND JUDAISM

In this last section, I talk about Kafka's final years and discuss the views on illness and how this originated and became a recurring topic. I also show how illness is, in the use made by Kafka, a form of perversion and, as such, becomes an element of performance.

As we have just seen, weakness was a consequence of the stereotypical representation of Jews as sick. So sick, in fact that the diseased nature of the Jew can be seen in the same expressions used by Nordau in the quoted passage, as a testimony of how culturally integrated was the imagery. Being stereotypically weak, Jews were also represented as sick: "There are no Jews without the mange. He is as proud of his work as the Jew of his skin disease. He is as scabby as a Jew".[170]

From society's perspective, the Jewish constant sickness is a perverted state, perfect excuse to put them at the margins of society. Even a Zionist journal like *Selbstwehr*, regularly read by Kafka, presented in 1914 an image of the Jewish patient as hypochondriac and incapable of accepting neither the cure nor the harmlessness of a physical condition.

> The Jewish patient does not suffer from the illness itself but rather from the fear of the illness and its consideration. Almost every

[169] Matthew T. Powell, "Bestial Representation of Otherness: Kafka's Animal Stories," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32, no.1 (2008): 129-142.

[170] Hiemer, *Der Jude im Sprichwort del Voelker*.

> Jewish patient presents the same question: "Is there no danger?" even when the illness is trivial. [...] The report of the doctor is not sufficient; the patient continues to ruminate about himself and collects all of the comments of other "experts" and repeats them in the greatest detail. He describes every symptom exactly. [...] To interrogate a Jewish patient is not easy. The Christian patient answers the doctor simply and directly; the Jewish patient answers the questions often with counter questions, starts to debate with the doctor, presents his own diagnosis and confuses the doctor with every new complaint, out of the fear that he did not present his complaint clear enough.[171]

After describing Jews as sick and weak, the propaganda made a further step: according to the standards of the time, women were considered weaker and subjugated. Thus, if Jews were weak and sick, their males and females were the same thing. In the stereotypes, the references to Jews were masculine features becoming more feminine, like the circumcision, or references to what usually defines women, like the small chest. Male Jews were so much visualised in terms of this image of illness that their figure became one with that of the tubercular Jewish woman. The Jew's visage was seen as similar "To those lean actresses, the Rachels and Sarahs, who spit blood and seem to have but the spark of life left, and yet who, when they have stepped upon the stage, put forth indomitable strength and energy".[172]

This comparison is even more interesting, when we consider the actress Sarah Bernhardt, the "Sarah" the quote refers to, was known mostly for playing male roles. Kafka acknowledged the resemblance between Jew male and female roles in the non-Jewish environments in 1920's *The Conscription of Troops*, where the person trying to belong to another environment, symbol of the stranger in a foreign culture, is always a female, excluded in the most humiliating way, with a soldier's fist in the back, because of her sex. Her anatomy is her destiny and therefore it is also every Jew's destiny. Like the woman in his story, Kafka saw in being a soldier the realization of manliness, but was unable to be one and could only dream of it, at least partially. It is easy to see the reason for his wishes in the father, who served in the Austrian army for two years, during which he was promoted to sergeant.[173] Being a soldier could have also helped see himself in a more masculine role, but instead his characters often have a feminine connotation and show a non-totally defined sexuality. However, I deal with the perversion of gender in the following chapter.

Nordau's new theory was in perfect accordance with a common trend starting at the beginning of the 20th century, that saw a rising interest in gymnastics, nutrition and, in general, health. Several new health theories came out and, even if they have now been abandoned or understandably catalogued under the label of "pseudo-medicine", they are a mirror of a time in which body and mind were seen as connected: training the former meant health in the latter. At the same time, Freud's psychoanalysis was moving its first steps in these very years and Kafka was not left immune to it, as we have seen before. The idea that people could be cured by making conscious their unconscious thoughts and motivations perfectly describes the need to shape the outside as one would like the inside to be.

Kafka was aware that Jews were seen as anxious, sick individuals, just like him. To him, Jews were in a way more justified to be sick and this could have been a possible justification to his hypochondria, partially a phobia, partially a hope, as we will see later. In a letter to Milena Jesenska, with whom Kafka had a mainly epistolary relationship between 1919 and 1920, after

[171] "Der jüdische Patient," *Selbstwehr* 8 (March 6,1914).
[172] William Z. Ripley, *The races of Europe* (New York: D. Appelton, 1899).
[173] Pawel, *Nightmare of Reason*.

she rhetorically asked if he was a Jew because of his terrified reaction to her request to meet her in person in Vienna, Kafka wrote:

> You ask me if I am a Jew. You must be joking. Perhaps what you are really asking is whether I am one of those anxiety-ridden Jews [...]. It also entitles you to reproach the Jews for their specific anxiety, although so generalized a reproach suggests a knowledge of human nature more theoretical than practical. Theoretical because [...] in my experience because it does not apply to most Jews. Third, it is applicable only to rare individuals, such as myself; but those it hits hard [...] The insecure position of the Jews, insecure within themselves, insecure among mankind, would make it supremely understandable for them to believe they can possess only what they can grasp [...] Jews are threatened by dangers from the most improbable quarters or, if for the sake of accuracy we leave out the dangers- threatened by threats.[174]

Psychoanalysis offered a cure for psychoanalytic illnesses in the years of Kafka's sickness, but, despite of an initial interest in the topic, Kafka then attacked Freudian ideas from several points of view, claiming that psychoanalytic approaches cannot cure the *Angst* of a mentally unstable person[175]. The fear to be cured is not uncommon in psychiatric patients and Kafka admitted to Max Brod that his tuberculosis may have been facilitated by his mental state:

> I am constantly seeking an explanation for this disease, for I did not seek it. Sometimes, it seems to me that my brain and lungs came to an agreement without my knowledge. "Things can't go on this way", said the brain, and after five years the lungs said they were ready to help.[176]

If his feelings towards psychoanalysis were mixed, Kafka was strongly influenced by many of the new concepts and became interested in the new theories of nutrition, acrobatics and gymnastics, following for years the gymnastics manual written by J.P. Muller and also attending lectures about the Dress Reform Movement. Together with it, he was also a follower of Fletcherism: according to its founder, Horace Fletcher, chewing every bite at least 32 times helped reduce the food intake while improving the nutrition. Although this has no scientific evidence, for Kafka it meant to have control on the food and, as Gilman suggests, on the meaning of self-sacrifice as a sign of the psyche of the Jews.[177]

The best, and probably most known, evidence of the influence these new medical techniques had on Kafka was given by the sanatoria. In 1905 he visited for the first time a sanatorium while on holiday in order to alleviate his chronic insomnia; the environment and life of the sanatorium made such an impression on him that he spent most of his holidays in sanatoria around Europe even before discovering his tuberculosis. The idea behind these places was that fresh, clean air, together with rest and a high calories diet would have helped the immune system to get rid of the illness by cleaning the lungs. Its bacterial origin was unknown and these places did little, if anything at all, to cure the infection. The diet was rich of milk, which Kafka was already consuming in very high quantities, but there were no controls on cows, making the sick ones a perfect way for the bacteria to spread around the population. In such a cultural

[174] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 19.

[175] Leena Eilittä, "Kafka's Ambivalence Towards Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalysis and history* 3, no.2 (2001): 205-210.

[176] Brod, *Letters to friends, Family and Editors*, letter of mid-September 1917.

[177] Gilman, *Franz Kafka: the Jewish Patient.*

background, it is easy to understand why Nordau's speech was so effective in the Jewish society: if discipline and rigour can cure illnesses in everyone, Jews, being seen as sick by nature, needed to be even more disciplined and rigorous. In fact, it wasn't just Nordau among the Jewish intellectuals to call for a revolution in physical behaviour. After having promoted Nordau's speech, in 1912 *Selbstwehr* incited Jews in several instances to be more active, to debate less and train more. This would have brought Jews closer to the ideal of a man: strong and healthy. "What makes a man a man is not his mouth, nor his mind, nor yet his morals, but discipline [...] What we need is manliness".[178] Kafka, who saw his body so weak and incapable of reaching his goals, was easily influenced by these words.

The attention given to his body and the importance given to physicality to reach any goal, including intellectual ones, is suggested by Kafka himself:

> It is certain that a major obstacle to my progress is my physical condition. My body is too long for its weakness, it hasn't the least bit of fat to engender a blessed warmth, to preserve an inner fire, no fat on which the spirit could occasionally nourish itself beyond its daily need without damage to the whole [...] What could it accomplish then, when it perhaps wouldn't have enough strength for what I want to achieve even if it were shorter and more compact.[179]

He took the role of the Jew needing both a physical and a mental cure and, probably having already unconsciously understood the basics of his psychosomatic illness, wrote:

> Possibly I could find other places where I could lie outside more, where the air is most bracing, and so on, but – and this is very important for the state of my nerves, which in turn is important to my lungs- I would not feel so much at ease anywhere else.[180]
>
> This state of health is very deceptive, it deceives even me; at any moment I am liable to be assailed by the most detailed and precise imaginings and invariably on the most inconvenient occasions. Undoubtedly an enormous hypochondria, which however has struck so many and such deep roots within me that I stand or fall with it.[181]

Kafka's anxiety as a Jew and as a patient intertwined both in his letters and in his literary production. Sander Gilman makes a compelling case showing how the source of the illness is seen in the blood, indicating both the bodily fluid and the metaphor for race.[182]

> I had a haemorrhage of the lung. Fairly severe; for ten minutes or more it gushed out of my throat; I thought it would never stop. [...] the outcome is that I have tuberculosis in both lungs. That I should suddenly develop some disease did not surprise me; nor did the sight of blood; [...] ultimately my maltreated blood had to burst forth [...] my headaches seem to have been washed away with the flow of blood.[183]

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[178] *Selbstwehr* (February 13, 1912).
[179] Kafka, *Diaries*, entry of 19/11/1911.
[180] Brod, *Letters to friends, Family and Editors*, letter dated "Beginning of 1917".
[181] Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, letter dated 4/6/1914 addressed to Grete Bloch.
[182] Gilman, *Franz Kafka: the Jewish Patient*.
[183] Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, letter dated 9/9/1917.

It is interesting to notice, incidentally, how the outburst of the illness seemed to give Kafka some relief: not only when he had his first hematic loss during the night, in 1917, he seemed relieved, as if happy to be proved right in his hypochondria, but only a few weeks later he put an end to the relationship with Felice.

> [after the pulmonary haemorrhage started] I got up, excited by the novelty of it all [...] the blood kept coming. At that I wasn't at all unhappy, because for some reason I gradually realized that, provided the haemorrhage stopped, I would be able to sleep for the first time after some three or four almost sleepless years. And in fact it did stop (it hasn't come back since) and I slept the rest of the night.[184]

However, Gilman adds: "[Kafka's] evident surprise at his haemorrhage leads us to assume that he expected his illness to take another, more familiar form, perhaps a cardiac condition like his father's. Here the notion of becoming what one is fated to become is violated".[185] The recurrence of this notion in Kafka has been proved by observing his attempt to make Jewishness match with non-Jewish standards, but then siding with Zionism. Shifting the parallel to his personal situation, he tried to improve his body, but at the same time expected the illness to come and thought to be a partial cause of its insurgence: regardless of how much one tries, one is bound to become what one tries to avoid. What appears dubious is if this notion has really been violated through the insurgence of tuberculosis. To justify his point, Gilman repeats that no one in Kafka's family suffered from tuberculosis. However, this does not contrast with Kafka's recurring topic that everyone becomes what they are destined to become. According to the anti-Semitic propaganda portraying Jews as mice and weak creatures, the Jewish population was more easily affected by tuberculosis as a consequence of the blood drawn during the circumcision.[186] Also, tuberculosis was considered an illness caused by immoral or intemperate habits.[187] Therefore why would Kafka exclude the possibility of becoming a tubercular Jew? Gilman refers to an "implied immunity from tuberculosis",[188] but Kafka's surprise does not appear anything more than genuine surprise for this specific illness of all the ones he, as a hypochondriac, had imagined. Also, he thinks his illness "resembles that of a child clinging to the pleats of his mother's skirts":[189] Jewishness is also transmitted through the mother, making the two even more comparable and relegating to a secondary importance what the actual illness is, as long as it is an illness.

The centrality of the role of Jewishness/illnesses cannot be ignored in Kafka's writings. In his stories some form of illness, like Jewishness, is the natural state of his characters, who are powerless to it. The characters can act as if they were not sick, perform their role of healthy individuals, like the protagonist of *Report to an Academy*, who performs the human role to avoid being seen as an ape, but their condition does not change. In some cases, sickness brings with it a sort of vampiric power to be cured, at least temporarily, through someone else's pain. Seen from another angle, the sick person needs a sacrifice to feel better. Neither of these belongs to the norm, according to which health is the basic state of the individual and illnesses will just make their course within the organism, making of illness a perversion of the human condition. The theme of sacrifice is quite obvious in *The Metamorphosis*, in which, before the transformation, Gregor is stronger than the rest of the family, as he is the one who provides for everyone. The

[184] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 5.
[185] Gilman, *The Jewish Patient*, 180.
[186] Ibid., 291.
[187] Clarence A. Lucas, *Tuberculosis and Disease caused by Immoral or Intemperate Habits* (Indianapolis: Bookwalter-Ball, 1920).
[188] Gilman, *The Jewish Patient* ,180.
[189] Brod, *Letters to friends, Family and Editors*, 138.

family is therefore the sick/weak character. The weaker/sicker Gregor grows as a consequence of the transformation, the stronger everyone else becomes, until when, with Gregor's death, they reach the peak of their health and happiness. The same happens with the doctor of *A country Doctor*, who, after realising his patient is almost dead, is stripped off his clothes and placed next to him, as if a sacrifice could solve the issue. The father of *The Judgment*, similarly, finds the old vigour and strength in his son's desperation and death. I have already mentioned how these last three examples of illness are showed or celebrated through indirect performances (the family's parade, the mob sacrificing the doctor and the father's speech), making again performances a useful tool to represent perversions. Explicit performances are also used: in *A Hunger Artist*, the artist's anorexia becomes a form of entertainment. This sick, perverted relationship with food, whose meaning will be discussed in the third chapter, is seen as a normal state that is just not possible to get rid of.

After having been left by Milena in 1920, Kafka's tuberculosis got worse and he started a long sick leave period which ended in 1922, with Kafka's early retirement from his work. These years and the following two were mostly spent in sanatoria, but neither the tuberculosis nor the constant state of agitation improved. Nonetheless, the style of his last short stories is similar to that of the previous years, with some hints to the imminent death (*Give it up!* Is the title of one, which refers to the words said in the story by the authoritative figure, a policeman, to Kafka's alter ego, worried about time), but whose topics are not significantly different from the previous ones.

In 1923, Kafka met Dora Diamant, fifteen years his junior, with whom he spent his last years. There is no doubt about how fascinated she was by him, but it is also the first time in which Kafka seemed to be more relaxed in a relationship with a woman. This is surely a sign of his attachment to her, but it could also be given by the fact that there was no sexual obligation with her, considering his illness had made him too weak for any activity more tiring than a short walk. Ironically, it was thanks to his illness, a condition that has been described as a perversion in his stories, that he managed to live a healthy relationship with a social peer, at least emotionally.

The last stories, written between 1923 and 1924, include the best examples of the different perversions he had dealt with until that point: together with the already mentioned *Josephine the Singer* and *A Hunger Artist*, he also wrote *A Burrow*, in which an animal keeps building the best possible lair to be alone and safe, which is hard not to compare to the feelings of a lonely man who, used to be an animal among humans and despite of a deadly illness and living in poverty because of the inflation in Berlin, was finally finding some peace.

In 1924, Kafka returned briefly to Prague, but left after three weeks for Vienna and then went to a sanatorium in Kierling, near Vienna, where he died on the 3rd of June.

Although it is hard to agree with Steiner and other critics who saw Kafka as a prophet of the Holocaust,[190] it should now be evident that, throughout his life, he was so influenced by an environment he never really felt to be part of, that he could only show a performance of it, perverting its every aspect through vivid images. As seen in this chapter, to understand Kafka's literature properly, it is necessary to expand the concept of perversion, including more than the sexual ones, but without forgetting that sexual perversions are possibly the clearest and the origin for the others. For this reason, the next chapter will discuss the perversion of gender and its implications on sexuality in Kafka's narrative, also showing how they are performed within Kafka's narrative and how they have been explored by contemporary performers.

[190] George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (New York: Athenaeum, 1967), 179.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER AND ITS PERVERSION

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I discuss the representation of genders and sexuality in Kafka's works and in some of their adaptations. To do this, I use the theoretical framework of gender studies, which, in my opinion, helps explain Kafka's use of gender and sex, as well as offering a lens through which analyse some of the metaphors used in Kafka's stories. Although gender studies are very recent and Kafka lived too early to be influenced by them (if not marginally, if we consider Freud as one of the starting points of gender studies),[191] I maintain they provide the tools for an interpretative model that can be used to understand the non-normative portrayal of genders made by Kafka. In fact, as I show later in the chapter using mainly an essay by Dagmar Lorenz, it can be argued that Kafka not only portrayed some of the major revolutions happening in his time in gender roles, but also mixed and perverted these roles. The main texts I will be using for this are *The Judgment*, *The Trial*, *Before the Law*, *The Metamorphosis* and two of its adaptations, both with the same title, even if for one of the two I use its original Russian title *Prevraschenie* (Valerie Fokin, 2002). The perversion of gender and sexuality is a key theme in Kafka's narrative and it can be seen as one of the starting points for every other kind of perversion. In the first part of this chapter I talk about gender studies and queer theory, which has several points in common with the perversion of gender, I go through their main ideas and relate them to Kafka and his use of gender as a fluid trait of his characters. Butler's idea of gender performance will be particularly useful to explain how the performance of his characters, showed in the second half of the chapter, relates to the perversion characterizing the stories. In fact, Kafka's perversion of gender shows *ante-litteram* features of a contemporary gender discourse, in which normality is established through performance and not through ontology. Finally, through the comparison between closet drama and Kafka's works, I show how the representation of a closet in which to hide identity and performances matches Kafka's necessity for and representation of a physical and metaphorical hideout.

GENDER STUDIES

This section will give a theoretical framework to gender studies and relate them to Kafka and his narrative to clarify why this field provides a useful lens through which to observe Kafka. In fact, gender studies are an interdisciplinary field studying gender and sexuality and their intersections with each other and other topics. Although relevant in gender studies, the concept of the closet will be addressed in another section. At the end of this section I also explain how performance is related to gender, a theory expressed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, which will be helpful when, later in the chapter, I'll show how genders are performed in Kafka's narrative and how the recurring performative element is related to the perversion of gender and gender roles. The conclusion of this analysis and comparison is that perversion of gender suggests there is no fixed gender at all: every sex can be any gender, therefore, through gender studies we see how "the concept of sexuality [can be seen] as a multilayered, intricate, also playful set of relations where women's and men's behaviour cannot be seen as reinforcing presupposed gender inequities".[192] This is an effect of Kafka's writing, rather than Kafka's conscious

[191] Fedwa Multi-Douglas, *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender* (Detroit: McMillan Reference, 2007).

[192] Philomena Essed, David T. Goldberg, Audrey Kobayashi, *A Companion to Gender Studies* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2009).

motivation, considering that the first time the term "gender identity" was used, starting a vaguely structured conversation about the topic, was more than forty years after Kafka's death.[193]

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Freud is often considered to be a precursor of gender studies, mainly thanks to his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in which he described the behaviour of different categories in sexuality and perversions and Kafka was "a careful and intelligent reader of Freud".[194] The essays are divided in sexual perversions, childhood and puberty. In the first essay we first find the distinction between sexual object and sexual aim: respectively what is desired and the description of the acts the perverted person wishes to perform with the sexual object. Kafka's use of perversion has a similar structure: as I show throughout this thesis, every perverted event in Kafka's stories has an object (usually a critique to standards as the sole approach to reality) and an aim. Psychoanalysis plays an important role in gender studies, having always been interested in understanding the process of becoming of a subject, even from a sexual point of view. This work contributed to the scientific observation of perverted tendencies and was part of a series of works starting in the 1880s that analyses the idea of gender perversion. It is particularly interesting to see how Freud distinguishes the presence of different kinds of sexuality, attributing innateness of perversions only to the "absolute inverts", meaning people whose sexual objects are of their own sex, as opposed to "amphigenic" and "contingent inverts", essentially meaning heterosexuals and people who are interested in their own sex only in cases of need or to imitate a leader.

> Innateness is only attributed to the first, most extreme, class of inverts, and the evidence of it rests upon assurances given by them that at no time in their lives has their sexual instinct shown any sign of taking another course. The very existence of the other two classes is difficult to reconcile with the hypothesis of the innateness of inversion.[195]

This passage shows two aspects of social expectations: the judgment on sexuality and the idea of a static sexuality. The judgment on sexuality is implied in the word "invert" to mean "homosexual": although it was a common word for the time, it carries a negative meaning and implies an inversion from a norm. Together with the word "pervert", this term was used to indicate something that went beyond the parameters of normal, a negation of the norm, which is heterosexuality. This idea, usually enforced in patriarchal societies, allowed the formulation of the concept of "compulsory heterosexuality"[196] reinforced in those societies by media, traditions, law and religion. In his writings, Kafka does not address directly compulsory heterosexuality or any other specific standard of his time, but law and religion as perpetrators of every standard are key to his literature and Chapter five will be dedicated to it. Kafka lived in a society in which stereotypical gender roles and the concept of sex as heterosexual sex were not flexible: everything that did not meet these ideas was considered a perversion in the worst sense of the word. What would have later been called "compulsory heterosexuality" was the norm. As I explain in more depth in the second half of the chapter, in the stories, men hold the power and set the standards while women either obey, in one way or another, or pervert their behaviour, becoming more, according to the standard, masculine. This approach is therefore a representation of a perversion to the idea of a static gender and sexuality, both standards vehemently promoted by religion and law as the only possibility for a non-perverted life. The postmodernist view that Kafka

[193] John Money, "The Concept of Gender Identity Disorder in childhood and adolescence after 39 years," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 20, no.3 (1994): 163-77.

[194] Luiz de Franca Costa Lima Neto, *The Limits of Voice: Montaigne, Schlegel, Kafka* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 204.

[195] Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, 5.

[196] Adrienne Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1980), 32.

unknowingly anticipates is that "things are not certain, orderly and fixed, but that instead they are uncertain, disorderly and fluid",[197] an idea linked to the concept of the "nomad" presented in chapter 1.

With the sexual revolution, the advent of Acts like Title VII in 1964[198] and the women's movement, in the 1960s feminism started having a bigger impact on society. Gender studies focused on the role, rather than the difference, of genders, questioning assumptions, studying and reporting the differences between men and women. The discourse so far was starting to show how sexuality and gender were tied to each other, so much, in fact, that it was (and is) hard to understand where one begins and the other ends. The presence of a hierarchy of the two genders and how it follows the same structure as gender differences in a patriarchal society, even more prevalent at the time, became clear:

> Female sexuality is marked as naturally masochistic, narcissistic and passive; male sexuality is inscribed as naturally aggressive, sadistic and active [...] Motherhood is seen as the natural expression of female sexuality.[199]

Being so linked to a heteronormative and reproductive idea of sexuality, the concept of sex was linked to vaginal penetration only, thus dismissing homosexuality and reinforcing the traditional idea of gender roles. In order for this hierarchy to exist, a binary opposition male/female is needed. Although none of his biographical writings show any explicit perspective on this issue, Kafka's male and female characters suggest him as a precursor to the gay and feminist movements in the 1970s, that were opposed to this duality and tried to change the way we look at sexuality. Some of Kafka's women work and have a sexual independence, just like men. It has been argued, as I discuss later, that his most independent women are negative characters, but I maintain that the perverted features describe the perversion of their behaviour and not of them as characters. Kafka's style is descriptive and tends towards pure objectivity: with very few exceptions, his descriptions of perversions reflect social aspects of his time and not an implicit judgment to the characters. Kafka's main characters embryonically match the approach to women suggested by thinkers like Shulamith Firestone, who claimed the necessity to severe the bond with motherhood to rethink the concept of sexuality and thus gender roles.[200] The foundation of gender studies, and Kafka's use of gender perversion, was that there was no "right" or "better" gender, nor any specific act that could be considered objectively correct. It is thanks to these thinkers and these movements' opposition that queer studies became a specialized area of gender studies and several queer theories could coexist with, and sometimes be born thanks to, feminism. The distinction between gender and sex had been formulated as early as 1949 by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Gayle Rubin has conceived sex and gender as two distinctive terms indicating two different aspects of the individual.[201] These two authors showed how a person does not belong to a specific gender at birth, but rather becomes that gender as the effect of culture and society. Commenting de Beauvoir, Butler asks:

> How can one become a woman if one wasn't a woman all along? And who is this "one" who does the becoming? Is there some human

[197] Pilcher and Whelean, *50 Key concepts in Gender Studies*, 109.

[198] An American Law that resulted from several campaigns for civil rights. The Act outlawed, among other, sexual discrimination on the workplace. This piece of legislation established a stepping stone for further anti-discriminatory laws.

[199] Anne Cranny-Francis, Wendy Waring, *Gender Studies* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2003), 7.

[200] Shulamit Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1970).

[201] Rubin, *The Traffic in Women.*

> who becomes its gender at some point in time? [...] When does this mechanism arrive on the cultural scene to transform the human subject into a gendered subject?[202]

As Butler explains, de Beauvoir suggests that a woman is a woman based on the meanings taken in the cultural environment, while at the same time "one is born with a sex, as a sex, sexed and that being sexed and being human are coextensive and simultaneous".[203] As an attribute, sex is part of the human, but "sex does not cause gender and gender cannot be understood to reflect or express sex".[204] De Beauvoir maintains that gender has to be acquired through culture and habits, as opposed to Wittig, for whom sex is gendered by definition, both being naturalized without being natural.[205] Kafka became a precursor of this perspective by showing that when an individual (and, by extension, a group) lives in a different reality, where the concept of the outsider expressed in the previous chapter places him and his characters, their behaviour will be different regardless of their sex. When this behaviour is placed in a society with other standards, that society considers the individual perverted in their gender, but this does not make that perversion ontologically wrong.

To explain how a gendered being can be the result of a sexed body that goes through the procedures of organisation and conventions starting from the biological and anatomical material of human sex and procreation, Rubin coined the term "sex/gender system". By comparing the roles of genders with the Marxist theory of class oppression, Rubin shows how women become engendered as females by the treatment they receive and are forced to accept in some societies.[206] In the next chapter I show how Kafka does the same in at least one of his works that joins gender and humanity as two socially acquired concepts.

In 1976 Foucault published the first of four volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, one of the most influential works in gender studies, providing "a persuasive historical narrative about the formation of a modern homosexual identity".[207] In his work, Foucault suggests that homosexuals started being identified through their acts only in the 19th century, when their identification changed, following the increasing medicalization of sexuality. Before then, they were not given an identity, but considered like men performing sexual acts with other men. To confirm this, Jonathan Walters shows how in ancient cultures, the feminine look and the physical immaturity of boys was considered enough to treat them as women, provided that they would be treated as women in sexual acts, without this diminishing the "masculinity" of the other man.[208] After the 20th century, men committing homosexual acts started being considered as different.

> Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[209]

This quote, particularly the last sentence, describes Kafka's same metaphor between species and sexuality, as well as proving the point of sexuality being historically and socially derived, rather than biologically. The consequence is that, as seen with Freud's use of words,

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[202] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 141.
[203] Ibid., 142.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Monique Wittig, "One is not born a Woman," *Feminist Issues* 1, no.2 (1981): 75-84.
[206] Rubin, *The Traffic in Women.*
[207] Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 10.
[208] Jonathan Walters, "No More Than a Boy: the Shifting Construction of Masculinity from Ancient Greece to the Middle Ages," *Gender and History 5*, no. 1 (1993): 20-33.
[209] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. I* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43.

those people who follow the social standard can be classified as "correct", while everyone else is "incorrect, wrong". From a Foucauldian perspective, "we might argue that its imprecision and breadth have granted the term ["homosexual"] a wide efficacy in regulating the behaviours of anyone who strays in any way from the heterosexual norm. [...] it was all the more useful as a threat".[210] Before queer theory and gender studies helped treat it as a normal part of life, homosexuality was subject to "grotesque medical pronouncements against it, in additions to the prescriptions of Jewish Law".[211] However, Kafka introduces homosexual elements into his narrative without stressing their importance treating them not as performances, but as normality, even if in the eyes of society they were perversions.[212] In the summary of *Description of a Struggle* contained in Chapter one, it can be noted how the narrator is jealous of the people surrounding his male friend and is so gratified when the two can walk together that he wishes to kiss him and starts dreaming. In a scene, later cut probably because too explicit and therefore in contrast with the subtlety of the other stories, of *The Trial*, Josef K. starts to seduce Titorelli. In several letters, as noted by S. Friedländer in his cited *Poet of Shame and Guilt*, there are several references to homosexual acts and desires and Stanley Corngold shows how *The Judgment* can be read as a specifically male sexual act.[213] In all these and others works, Kafka narrates a story containing homosexual elements, but they are neither the focus of the story, nor hidden in plain sight to be noticed by the reader as they were in, for example, Oscar Wilde or Virginia Woolf. Kafka's homosexual elements are even less stressed than heterosexual sex, which is treated as something dirty and exceptional, in accordance with Kafka's feeling that "the deeper realm of sexual life [was] closed to [him]".[214] On the contrary, homosexual elements appear in perverted situations, but are not the cause of that perversion, at least superficially. They are so integrated in the story, treated as obvious that the reader can only passively accept as normal what otherwise they would have considered perverted and keep continue reading the story without noticing. Building on Deleuze and Guattari's reference to Kafka's "homosexuality of tight clothes",[215] something as normal as characters wearing tight clothes is an indicator of unclear sexuality, but at the same time is not relevant in the story. It simply happens to be a feature of the character in question, but not a relevant one. Non-heterosexuality as a normal part of society is what queer theory advocates and what Kafka treats as normal, thus putting again in doubt, like Foucault, the meaning of standards and perversion.

In 1980, Adrienne Rich first used the term "compulsory heterosexuality" mentioned above, by which she meant that heterosexuality was a political institution acting as a mechanism regulating thoughts about gender roles and sexual choices either reinforcing them for those who comply or punishing and excluding those who try to oppose it. According to culture, heterosexuality becomes the only healthy, non-perverted way of living one's sexuality. Homosexuality and bisexuality, in fact, are directed towards one's own gender and other perverted activities involve objects or acts as the source of pleasure and therefore break the relation between the two sexes. Rich suggested lesbianism as a rejection to patriarchy and the way to get rid of the woman's dependence on men for sexual and psychological completion, thus getting rid also of men's economic and social support over women.[216] Heteronormativity, according to Rich, is constantly imposed and accepted because of the little attention and the

[210] Cranny, 24.

[211] Torton Beck, *Kafka's Triple Bind*, 356.

[212] For a more extensive analysis of metaphors and references read, among others, Margaret S. Breen, "Reading for Constructions of the Unspeakable in Kafka's Metamorphosis," in *Understanding Evil: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Margaret S. Breen (New York: Rodopi, 2003), 43-53.

[213] Stanley Corngold, "Kafka and Sex," *Daedalus* 136, no.2 (2017): 79-87.

[214] Brod, *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, 194.

[215] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 68.

[216] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, Albert Gelpi (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 203-223.

stigmatization lesbians receive in society and the falsification of lesbian history, described as similar to that of gay men. What she was suggesting was essentially to change the performance of gender to change the power relations. Judith Butler developed an extensive theory of gender performance in *Gender Trouble*. In Kafka we can see something similar through his characters, showing that men and women have to conform to specific standards to be considered "male" and "female" by a regulating society. Nonetheless, his characters pervert social expectations by applying the same principle of performativity discussed by Butler, even if in an unexpected fashion: powerful men are often subtly ridiculed and women show independence in spite of their obedience. Furthermore, in his personal life, Kafka rebelled, although not explicitly, to the idea of marriage, one of the duties of a Jewish man, as Marthe Robert shows using Kafka's letters to Felice.[217] The role assigned to men was to be strong husbands and fathers, whose health in marriage was fundamental to the family's well-being. Kafka was aware of what was required of him, given that his father met all these requirements and was immersed in Jewish society, so Kafka had to at least pretend he wanted to perform his duty. His hypochondria, another feature that fitted more a woman than a man, however offered him an easy way out from the performance required to him:

> My health is only just good enough for myself alone, not good enough for marriage, let alone fatherhood. Yet when I read your letter, I feel I could overlook even what cannot possibly be overlooked.[218]

Butler's text was so influential that gender studies since then have often used it as a starting point to discuss identity and gender itself, offering additional perspectives to what is now considered established. It would be too long and beside the point to name all of the critics, both positive and negative, but Lynne Segal summarizes its influence correctly by saying:

> After Butler, identities and belongings, whether gendered or of any other hue, can never be securely pinned down. They must be seen as fundamentally contingent, stabilized only through the performative acts that attempt, unsteadily, to fix them as integral markings of our existence. Nevertheless, identity concepts remain pivotal to our ways of perceiving the world, positioning ourselves and asserting differing forms of agency within it. [...] Butler has herself shifted her analysis of subjectivities, even coming to embrace forms of identity for political ends, although, of course, never less than critically.[219]

Before proceeding further in the analysis of Kafka's use of gender, it is important to refer to what constitutes the understanding of gender as a social construct and how, as members of a socio-cultural group, we recognize males from females according to Butler's performance of gender.

JUDITH BUTLER AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER

In 1990 Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble*, in which she showed how gender studies until that moment and feminism treated women as a group of people with similar characteristics and interests, thus reinforcing the binary division between genders. In her view, they should have opened up to the option to choose one's identity. Rather than seeing gender as

[217] Marthe Robert, *Franz Kafka's Loneliness* (London: Faber, 1982).
[218] Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, letter dated 11th November 1912.
[219] Segal, *After Judith Butler: Identities, Who Needs Them?*,

a fixed attribute, Butler argues, it should be seen as a more fluid characteristic that can change depending on the context:

> Categories of true sex, discrete gender and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics. These constructs of identity serve as the points of epistemic departure from which theory emerges and politics itself is shaped. [...] Is "the body" or "the sexed body" the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate?[220]

As expressed in this passage Butler refuses the idea of gender determined by sex and body, as if they were compulsory limits under which identity and sexuality have to operate. According to her, "identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results",[221] meaning that actions and behaviour determine gender, rather than gender being determined by objective, immutable factors. Essentially, gender is a performance that should not be determined by hegemonic cultural configurations, as it is presently. The fact that genders are performed through acts, gestures and enactments means "that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality".[222] In other words, there is no original object that is represented in that performance, because every representation of gender is an enactment in itself. This system of identification through representation, even without having any other foundation than the representation itself, is so consolidated in our understanding and classification that Butler maintains: "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender and without those acts there would be no gender at all".[223] This thought is key to understand every perversion expressed by Kafka: if there was no accepted performance of a standard, there would be no perversion of any standard. Therefore, he shows how what is called perversion can also be a performance of a new standard, thus annihilating the idea of standards as ontologically correct performances.

To prove her point, Butler uses Foucault's exploration of hermaphrodites to show how, as a society, we tend to reductively attribute one gender or another to individuals. The evidence brought by Butler is recognized as compelling even by one of her critics:

> [Butler] is right to insist that we might have made many different classifications of body types, not necessarily focusing on the binary division as the most salient; and she is also right to insist that, to a large extent, claims of bodily sex difference allegedly based upon scientific research have been projections of cultural prejudice.[224]

This idea of performance has some points in common with Kafka's performative language. In Kafka's fiction not only, as I exemplify throughout this thesis, are genders performances perverted, but every character has a specific role and can belong to society only through that role. When a character does not follow his or her role, a perversion is enacted: as Battistini showed in his theatre adaptation of *The Trial*, the only character not to wear a mask is the protagonist himself, whose lack of an identifiable role situates him remote from the world described by the other characters. When actors wear a mask, their body movements gain in significance and potency[225] and the result, when playing roles that are already written based on

[220] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 164.
[221] Ibid., 25.
[222] Ibid., 173.
[223] Ibid., 178.
[224] Nussbaum, *The Professor of Parody*.
[225] Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

specific gender roles, is to stress their femininity or masculinity. The contrast with an actor who is not wearing a mask is striking: the audience is able to see his expressions and realize that he is the only character that is not passively accepting what is around him. He is the perversion because outside of the accepted behaviour, but at the same time the only one who can show the absurdity of the standard he is breaking. Nonetheless, this does not mean the main character is not performing any role, but, similarly to Pirandello's fool,[226] his role is to show the absurdity of the "normal" world full of masks and this can only be achieved by erasing the identity imposed on him by society. As I also suggest in the last chapter, the Law operating in Kafka's fiction (and particularly in this text) demands characters to identify themselves in a specific role, to wear a mask. In the adaptation, Josef K., committing an act of perversion, erases his identity by removing his mask and therefore not belonging to the story's society anymore.

To start questioning gender and identity, Butler and others suggest that one has to question the ontology of gender:

> What the person "is" and what gender "is", is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined. As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations.[227]

In this passage, Butler clarifies that gender has more to do with culture than with objective parameters, gender needs to be related to identity, a concept that Kafka expresses through the outsider's lack of standard identity, which also brings to further perversion. Braidotti's above mentioned concept of "nomad" explained in 1994 shows how an individual's identity can still make sense even when the self-identification implies several, potentially contradicting categories at once. Bartos[228] and Clausen[229], among many others, show the same by discussing the example of self-identified homosexuals in relationships with straight members of the opposite sex. To the eyes of an external beholder basing their judgment on cultural standards, that person would be heterosexual, so what makes them homosexual, if not their own identity and performance? The idea of identity being the effect of a performance rather than some inner "core" is key to the understanding of Kafka's use of gender, as well as to queer theory.

QUEER THEORY AND PERVERSION

The concept of perversion and, more specifically, the perversion of gender discussed in this chapter is strongly connected to everything falling under the umbrella of the word "queer". In the context of queer studies, queerness is a form of perversion that has to do with gender, sexuality and identity, but perversions span through different topics and often show identity crises relatable to identity. Although it has been attempted, it has so far proved impossible to satisfactorily give a sole definition of what queer is, because "its definitional indeterminacy, its

[226] According to Pirandello, everyone is performing a role wearing a mask. The fool is the only exception to the rule and is considered a fool because, with his lack of role, he does not fit in any social context. At the same time, however, the fool is also free to express his ideas (ab)using the fact that no one takes him seriously. See, among others, Eric Bentley, *The Pirandello Commentaries* (Evanstone: Northwestern University Press, 1986) and Karl Chircop, "Joyce and Pirandello 'Foolosopher' Kings and Mocking Gargoyles: Buck Mulligan and Enrico IV," *Symposia Melitensia* 11 (2015). 35-44 for a series of examples and in-depth explanations about the behaviour of the fool.

[227] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 15

[228] Michael Bartos et al., *Meaning of Sex Between Men* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1993).

[229] Jan Clausen, "My Interesting Condition," in *Out/Look: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly* 7, (1990): 11-21.

elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics".[230] Although it surely had great importance in the development of gay and lesbian studies, queer theory is not merely their synonymous, as it involves a wider spectrum of topics, like cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and in general everything that implies a mismatch between biological gender, sexuality and identity. In fact, we define as a manifestation of "queerness" an essay like "The Leather Menace" (Gayle Rubin, 1981), in which, recalling and confronting the feminist group *Lavender Menace*, the author speaks in favour of masochism. In the specific case of Kafka's works and life I argue, together with Saul Friedländer,[231] that non-sexual perversions have a sexual or queer origin.

Identity is of primary importance in queer theory: it is argued that gender, sex and sexuality are different from the static concepts that they have always be seen as. Identification forms the ego: "the ego is first and foremostly a bodily ego"[232] and "this bodily ego will assume a gendered morphology".[233] According to Freud, and agreed by Butler, ego is formed through a process of losing loved objects, the consequent creation of a sense of melancholia and the resolution of grief. Once an object in the external world has been lost, the ego builds itself around that loss by identifying with the loss itself, even if after an initial period in which the loss is blamed, demonised or abused for having abandoned the subject.[234] This is valid for the categories of masculinity and femininity, too, and in order to recognize oneself in one or the other, it is necessary to lose some sexual attachments, which usually happens with the internalization of the incest taboo and the Oedipal conflict. However, this implies that neither masculinity nor femininity are dispositions, because, Butler argues, "the prohibition of incest presupposes the prohibition on homosexuality, for it presumes the heterosexualization of desire".[235] The formation of identity thus begins with the prohibition of the same-sex parent as object of desire, which means that the desire for a same-sex partner would translate to panic for the gender identity and thus the ego. This whole discourse explains what I have earlier referred to as the standards for gender identification given through education by a society imposing heterosexual desire. The loss of an Oedipal fight has been frequently observed in Kafka's literature: having never internalized or won a conflict with his father, as repeatedly showed in the section about father figures, Kafka's identification, at least from a fictional perspective, in a masculine or feminine standard is lost. As a consequence, his gender-perverted (queer) main characters are born and, with them, their perspective on a world that perceives them as perverted. These characters do not show specifically homosexual features: as described by Butler, the differences between homosexual and heterosexual are to be found in loss and melancholia, both predominant in Kafka's literature and life, showing how the "prohibition on homosexuality pre-empts the process of grief and prompts a melancholic identification which effectively turns homosexual desire back upon itself".[236] In the identification with gender, the social preference for heterosexual or homosexual desire is meaningless: what makes the difference is the presence of a differentiation. Individuals learn what it means to be masculine and feminine and then identify with one of the two, experiencing the loss of one or the other that causes melancholia. Recent critics, in commenting Butler's work, have argued in favour of a pre-discursive individual prior to the social discourse "in which the intentionality of the gender parody is located".[237] However, I would argue that intentionality in gender identification is highly arguable. If there are no specific genders and

[230] Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 1

[231] Friedländer, *Kafka: the Poet of Shame and Guilt*,

[232] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: Norton & Company, 1960), 26.

[233] Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," in *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, Simon Watson, Carrie Mae Weems (London: Psychology Press, 1995), 21-36.

[234] Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1917).

[235] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997), 135

[236] Butler, *Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification*, 30

[237] Geoff Boucher, "The Politics of Performativity: A critique to Judith Butler," *Parrhesia* 1 (2003): 112-141.

closed categories and gender can only be determined in a social context, only socio-cultural determinism can impose gender on every person. The person itself would not have an independent choice, if they were not immersed in their culture.

Although Kafka was not aware of these theories, his work describes a perspective of social upbringing over the individual. In particular, two of his stories can be read as an authoritarian imposition of gender over a pre-discursive individual.

GENDER PERFORMANCE AND KAFKA

In Kafka's stories there are several examples showing the impositions of society over the individual that can be read under a gender perspective. In the next chapter I talk more in detail about *A Report to an Academy* and its theatrical adaptation. Here I briefly mention Kafka's story *In the Penal Colony* as an example of social gender imposition. In this story, the reader looks through the eyes of the visitor of a penal colony, who is taken around the colony by an officer and witnesses the functioning of the machine used for punishments, now so old and patched that it has become an inconceivable whole, made of parts that don't fit, but still somehow work. This machine is part of tradition and its origin is unknown. The condemned person is placed in the machine before knowing what they are guilty of. Slowly, the machine starts writing the accusation on the person's body using a series of needles activated by a complex mechanism. The pain is constant but never excessive and the food next to the victim is at the same time a relief from hunger and a tool to keep the person awake for the duration of the punishment. The victim's guilt cannot be understood until a few moments before death, when the victim finally understands what they have been condemned for. At the end of the story, the soldier straps himself to the machine and dies together with it, conscious that the visitor won't intercede with the authority to keep the machine operational.

The main elements of the story work as metaphors for society and identity, including gender identification. Kafka's stories are occasionally used by Butler to clarify her arguments and in this case she suggests seeing the state of the machine as a symbol for power under a Foucaultian interpretation: "[the machine of *In the Penal Colony*] has become so diffuse that it no longer exists as a systematic totality".[238] The condemned person's guilt (i.e. the perversion they are guilty of) is known to the official (a personification of a strict society, in this reading), but not to the convict, who will only find it out at the very end, before dying. The victim's death corresponds to the birth of gender in the new individual. Similarly, the age of the machine and the fact that its origin is lost in time suggest how old is the habit of attributing genders to individuals; so old, in fact, that individuals in society have lost the blueprint and do not know how the whole works. The perversion and absurdity of this act is also stressed by the sadomasochism implied in the use of a torture device: the society/officer would like to keep using it, regardless of the pain inflicted or the absurdity of such a punishment, but if the instrument collapses, society (or at least this part of society) has to die with it.

The key element of every interpretation of this story is the imposition of something unknowable on individuals who are unable to opt out of the inscriptions made upon them. What Kafka is discussing here, thus positioning himself on the same perspective as queer theory, is identity as socially prescribed. The victim is forced to accept the punishment and becomes guilty of whatever is being inscribed upon him, regardless of having actually committed the deed or not (i.e. "being" what is being attributed to him). If we unpack the metaphor, every individual is forced to accept the identity imposed on them, including the performance their imposed gender is subject to, regardless of them agreeing to it or not. Such an interpretation is necessarily modern, as it would not have been possible before the birth of gender studies and the realization that a person can be born with a sex on which external influences impose a gender they may do not identify with. Doubts about one's sexuality and gender identity in Kafka's time were considered

[238] Butler, *Gender Troubles*, 202.

the expression of a perversion and therefore the "perverted" person had to remain hidden and express their own doubts and questions in a coded language, something that didn't need to be understood by anyone else. In performance studies this kind approach to secretive expression of identity is referred to as "closet drama", therefore for a writer like Kafka we can refer to this phenomenon as "closet prose".

CLOSET DRAMA AND CLOSET PROSE

In this section, I am going to adapt the concept of "closet drama" to argue that Kafka's style is a "closet prose" and thereby suggest that the events causing Kafka's narratives to unfold are comparable to the process of coming out. By comparing the perverted event happening to Kafka's alter-egos to the act of coming out, I am not suggesting any relationship specifically with homosexuality (although a case can be made, as suggested earlier), but that the indeterminacy of what happens to the characters mirrors the impossibility of identifying someone in a single gender, as argued by queer theory.

The term "closet drama" refers to those queer performances considered unsuitable for representation due to their themes, the social context in which they were written or, in general, because they were meant for reading only. According to Salvato's chronology, closet drama became a significant phenomenon in the 20th century, thanks to post-Freudian works like Pound's translation of *Electra*,[239] but there have always been texts that can belong to the category and they were particularly popular in the gothic period.[240]

The use of closet drama, though, goes much further back. So much, in fact, that it is not possible to establish a point in time when it was born. Any text written in a theatrical language, but that does not depend on any form of improvisation or stage technique belongs to drama. Thus, even Plato's dialogue can technically be considered drama, being written as a dialogue, but not for stage. In a similar fashion, closet drama became particularly popular during the closure of public theatres imposed in England during the *Interregnum*, with Thomas Killigrew probably being the most prolific author of the period.[241] In this period, drama was used for propagandist aims, thanks to the fact that playreading "was not thought to be of any political consequence".[242] However, in these cases authors were not choosing not to perform their works, but this was a consequence of their social setting. Marta Straznicky dates the dichotomy between "closet" and "public" to the 18th century,[243] when closet drama became a way to avoid censorship and to take part in political activism.

> Although the term sometimes carries a negative connotation, implying that such works either lack sufficient theatrical qualities to warrant staging or require theatrical effects beyond the capacity of most (if not all) theatres, closet dramas through the ages have had a variety of dramatic features and purposes not tied to successful stage performance.[244]

Even if the social use of closet drama can be dated to the 18th century, it is important to notice its use as an alternative to public theatre, in which women were not allowed to engage until

[239] Salvato, *Uncloseting Drama*.

[240] Diane Hoeveler, "Joanna Baillie and the Gothic Body: Reading Extremities in Orraand De Monfort," *Gothic Studies* 3, no.2 (2001): 117-133.

[241] Dale B. Randall, *Winter Fruit: English Drama 1642-1660* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1995).

[242] David Scott Kastan, "Performance and Playbooks: The Closing of Theatres and the Politics of Drama," in *Reading, society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 167.

[243] Straznicky, *Closet Drama*.

[244] Dennis Kennedy, *Theatre & Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 282.

the Restoration. The works of Margareth Cavendish and Jane Lumley, for example, were written in such a way so as to be read simulating a performance, but without being actually performed, especially in public theatres.[245] In this way, closet drama managed to go against the convention to keep women away from having any role in public theatres.

From the perspective of gender studies, the word "closet" in "closet drama" is a reminder of the relationship to privacy and the necessity of hiding something from the public eye, which was so common for women and non-heterosexual individuals. Nonetheless, the closet usually contains useful items of some kind:

> Being as it was a small room, [...] furthest removed from spaces such as the hall or gallery in which the household's more communal life was conducted, the closet was easily adapted to a variety of functions requiring some control of access [...]. While none of these functions is unambiguously private, the fact that they involve the concept of concealment or retreat has led literary scholars to link certain closet practices (mainly the devotional, administrative and literary) with the intersecting discourses of secrecy, surveillance and subjectivity, all of which are structured by distinctions between private and public.[246]

The tradition of closet drama, according to Baillie, encourages readers to study the content rather than the form, the ideas rather than the staging and also pushes critics to consider and reflect on how "the 'rejected theatre' [...] affect[s] readings of theatre history".[247]

Salvato points out in his introduction to 20th century closet drama that the representation of a closet drama may transform it into something else due to the rejection of the idea of privacy that is intrinsic in performance. In fact, one of the features of a performance is the audience, so drama can be closeted only until it is performed. Essentially, performance is the cause of the perversion of closet drama. It can be argued that every adaptation of Kafka's texts goes through the same process of perverting a closet drama: with the exception of the unfinished *The Warden of the Tomb*, none of his texts has an explicitly theatrical language.

Adapters of Kafka's stories seem to have realized the closet is a key element in his narrative from an early stage: Orson Welles played with camera angles and confusion of spaces throughout the whole adaptation of *The Trial*, above all by shooting establishing shots of buildings that suggested much bigger spaces than the ones in which the actions take place. Similarly, the 1993 film adaptation of the story takes a bold decision by setting the sex scene between Josef K. and Leni in a small room, regardless of the size not being specified by Kafka. This adaptation is almost literal, but here the director changes the original text. Leni demands from Josef to be called by name if he wants to be saved, as well as demanding his confession. This dialogue does not exist in the book and the change seems to suggest that identity is at stake in the trial: names identify people and only a name can save an accused person. In fact, the whole room, a closet, is under the scrutiny of a judge represented by a painting. Closets, as seen before, are usually places to find peace and quiet, but this one has been infiltrated by the justice persecuting Josef K. and that he is trying to be absolved by. Whatever happens in this closet will be official. Leni has a physical defect, a membrane between two fingers that makes her hand look like a fin, which is reminiscent of the animal elements of human bodies, typical of demon

[245] Martha Straznicky, *Privacy, Playreading and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[246] Ibid. 114.

[247] Catherine Burroughs, "The Persistence of Closet Drama: Theory, History, Form," in *The Performing Century: Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History*, ed. Tracy C. Davis, Peter Holland, (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2007), 230.

iconography.[248] The demonic behaviour is also repeated in her offer of pleasure and salvation through a lie that will make the protagonist free, but also identified as guilty for the rest of his life. Essentially, the closet is, even for the director, the place in which identity is discovered and challenged.

Can we then talk about a "closet prose"? The visual and performative language contained in Kafka's prose makes adaptations of different kinds possible, but, it may be argued, an adaptation opens that closet. The answer seems to be yes, but this answer may be valid every time we transform "words" into "things", as Byron said to justify his closet prose.[249] The reason why Kafka's prose is "closet prose" has to do with why Kafka was writing. Until relatively late in his life, Kafka did not write for publication and even less for performance. His goal was to "cast off his demons on the page"[250] and thus his writing was as intimate as that of closet drama writers and only meant for a restricted audience. Kafka's prose was therefore a deeply intimate affair: Max Brod found out that his friend had literary aspirations years after meeting him and the idea of publishing his works terrorized Kafka enough to bring out his obsessive need for control and perfection.[251] Once the works were published, the main buyer of the printed books was Kafka himself: "Eleven books were sold at André's store. I bought ten of them myself. I would love to know who has the eleventh".[252]

After being published, Kafka's prose didn't change substantially, in terms of style and audience: the stories remained personal and mirror his personal state of mind in the specific moments of his life, even if he knew they may have been published. His autobiographical tone allowed him to express his (at least literary) identity, so that there was no need for a chronological differentiation of his style in this regard. The fact of having a restricted audience makes the parallel with closet drama even stronger: like for its dramaturgical counterpart the goal is not to sell tickets, Kafka's works were not aimed to publication, but to mirror the author's personal situation and, in some cases, the reaction to personal and social events.

To publish what is not meant to be published is like adapting what is not meant to be adapted, as it adds audience to what should be limited to a restricted group. If Salvato is right in saying that to uncloset a drama means to change its nature, to adapt what is meant neither to be published nor to be staged, adds a second layer to the act of "uncloseting". Things like showing specific settings and scenes, actors and delivering lines in a specific way, define the whole work in an immutable form, which is something that Kafka avoided by using only key elements to describe people and places. Furthermore, the audience watching the adapted work is different, although partially overlapping, from the audience reading the written text and this contributes to make the work something different from what it was intended to be.

Kafka's prose is also a prose *of* the closet. I mentioned why the term "closet" is useful when referred to dramatic literature that deals with topics that have to remain hidden for some reason. As I further elaborate below, the question of identity of self is recurring in Kafka's works, again reflecting one of the main topics of queer theory. If the latter recognizes the presence of a metaphorical closet to come out from, the former makes a constant use of restricted spaces to confine characters in: a machine, a room, a cage, a bed, an office and so on. Maud Ellmann refers to Kafka several times in *Hunger Artists*, mentioning also the necessity of artists to be excluded from life, comparing the concept of artistic autonomy with that of autophagy:[253] lacking

[248] Jeffrey Burton Russel, *Lucifer: the Devil in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 210.

[249] L. E. Marshall, "Words Are Things: Byron and the Prophetic Efficacy of Language," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 25, no.4 (Autumn 1985): 801-822.

[250] Reiner Stach, *Kafka: the Decisive Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 275.

[251] Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason*.

[252] Quoted in Reiner Stach, *Kafka: The Decisive Years, Volume 2* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2013), 343.

[253] Ellmann, *Hunger Artists*, 69.

any nourishment from society, artists eat themselves. She further develops the concept repeating that "Kafka felt it was impossible to write unless he were immured against the influence of other beings";[254] encrypment was essential to the creative process. The physical space in which Kafka's characters are confined and what happens in there is telling: his characters are often safe only in their room and it is in small spaces that the unconscious is revealed. From these confined spaces, Kafka's characters start their journey.

The presence of a retreat in a confined space is evocative of the treatment of space in gender discourse. In Kafka's time, the bourgeois norm was for women to take care of the house, thus giving a gender even to the space and how it is used. Adrienne Rich's "politics of relocation" tells how space delineates what bodies are permitted in certain spaces and what bodies are not. Like Butler, Salvato suggests that coming out of the closet only confines into another space.[255] Butler is referring to the metaphorical coming out of homosexual individuals and how their gender performance changes: now that they are "officially" recognized, they act in another way and their social environment acknowledges the change, dealing with them in some other way.[256] The initial perverted situation that allows the story to start is the "coming out", and the rest of the story continues the perversion: the standards of gender are not respected anymore, the victim of the perversion is confined in a new set of behaviours and the world around him starts behaving differently. Elizabeth Boa shows how the change of the character's situation in Kafka's stories implies also a change of his space.[257] The perversion suffered by the character brings changes that need to be mirrored in the character's haven, his closet. Stories like *The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial* and *The Judgment*, all of which feature small physical spaces in which perversions happen, are linked by the systematic use of a male protagonist, male authority figures and female characters with similar behaviours and roles among the stories. So similar, in fact, that their performance is foreseeable based on their sex. Because there are two biological sexes and three types of performances based on the character's roles within the fictional society, what we are actually observing is the performance of three genders.

THE THREE GENDERS

Dagmar Lorenz's essay[258] is one of the very few[259] to discuss the role of gender in Kafka's literature. As I think it is an aspect that has been vastly underestimated, I refer to her essay extensively and expand on it to show how genders are used and perverted in Kafka's stories and their adaptations.

Lorenz's premise is that "for Kafka one is not born male or female [...] one becomes one or the other, or sometimes a mixture of the two".[260] Lorenz is correct in showing that Kafka uses gender in a way that is hard to define based on standards or closed definitions, but the representation of sexual emancipation in itself is not the main reason for the peculiar use of gender roles. This explanation applies to female characters thanks to the contrast between the chaste "mother" figures made of the old generation and the worker, sexually free and younger

[254] Ibid., 73.

[255] Salvato, *Uncloseting Drama*, 177.

[256] Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Lesbian and Gay Study Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993): 307-320.

[257] E. Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class and Race in the Letters and* Fiction,

[258] Lorenz, *Kafka and Gender*.

[259] Boa's quoted works, as well as Sander Gilman's discuss the topic of gender, focusing mainly on masculinity. Mark Anderson also touches the topic on several occasions in *Kafka's Clothes*, even if he never specifically addresses it. Ellmann's *The Hunger Artists* also suggests the importance of gender in Kafka when she shows how fasting and starvation is a mostly feminine act, but also particularly common in Kafka's stories. Other commentators, some of them quoted later in the chapter, have also showed the contrast between specific male and female characters, but Lorenz and those named here discussed in more generic terms about gender and its relevance in Kafka's narrative instead of only focusing on specific stories and characters.

[260] Lorenz, *Kafka and Gender*, 169.

"prostitutes", but does not fully explain the female traits of main characters and some authority figures. The idea of gender perversion is a more comprehensive explanation and is consistent with the other traits of Kafka's literature. Even if Kafka's environment did not allow him to be more explicit about it, what he did was effectively to create a new gender identity in his alter-egos. This third gender is perverted because not identifiable in Kafka's society: it has features of the other two, but is not explicitly homosexual. The lack of explicit identification with homosexuality is a perversion in itself: as Halperin's and Jagose's observe, to perform within the expectations of a known gender or sexuality is key for society to recognise that one belongs to that gender.[261]

Elisabeth Boa has correctly argued that, in accordance to the social standard of the time, men in Kafka's literature *do*, while women *feel*.[262] With only a few exceptions, the three main kinds of characters portrayed by Kafka are male authority figures, female characters and male protagonists, who are usually Kafka's alter-ego. I am not mentioning female main characters here, as they are only a unique case (*Josephine the Singer)* and it is even debatable if the female character is actually the main one. The perverted event begins the narration and that puts in jeopardy the natural course of events. Depending on the story, this event can be a transformation (*The Metamorphosis*), an arrest that goes against any rule (*The Trial*), an illogical knowledge of facts and people (*The Judgment*) and so on. The repercussions of the event are at the same time a revolution, but also the revelation of reality and of the true gendered nature of the characters. The perverted event leads most characters to the reassertion of their gender roles, while the main characters suffer a gender perversion which is potentially the discovery of their true identity, but nonetheless a perversion because sex and gender may not match anymore. Although the events, taken literally, do not necessarily have to do with gender, they allow the reader to witness gender performances that do not match with the expected gender standard. After and thanks to the perverted events, the characters of the story show their genders through their performance. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor's father re-asserts his previously perverted gender role by going back to being the breadwinner, while Gregor performs the "female" role of dependant and the "male" role of head of the house by creating in his room a home within the home. Here, he has "male" privileges like sexual gratification (as suggested by the portrait of the woman, on which Gregor finds relief for his hot belly,[263] a metaphor for sexual desire), dominance of the space and food served by women who, at least initially, perform their role of nurturers. The perverted event changes the ambiguous relationship between Gregor and Grete, but also creates the need for her to work and help the family. Once the perverted event has come to an end with Gregor's death, Grete will be asked to get married and go back to what is expected from her gender. However, her working skills, previously seen as a perversion of her gender performance, are now accepted as a new standard that can go together with her blossoming femininity.

Similar perversions of gender performances happen in other texts. In *The Trial*, after the arrest Josef K. becomes always more incapable of working, therefore becoming less effective in the role assigned him as a male. To compensate, he starts using sex as a tool to get to his goals, a technique stereotypically associated with women. Particularly meaningful to show the change of gender role is the already mentioned deleted passage, in which Josef, who was assumed to be exclusively heterosexual, fantasizes about offering homoerotic advances to Titorelli to win his favour.

Performances of gender are not exclusively perverted, though: Kafka's older generations tend to comply with the expected standards (after all, they are the ones who created them) even when they seem not to. In *The Judgement*, the previously sick father of the protagonist regains

[261] Jagose, *Queer Studies* and David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8.

[262] Boa, *The Double Taboo*, in *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race*, 112.

[263] Mark Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siecle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 123-144.

energy through a performance that reminds the "performative utterance" described by Austin.[264] With literally a simple hand movement through which he gets rid of the bedsheets, symbol of illness and, as observed in the previous chapter, femininity, he re-obtains his masculine power and shifts the feminine role onto Georg, his son, who becomes so masochistically submissive to the male leader, that he feels compelled to immediately execute the death sentence he receives. Georg's father is one of the most representative examples of the first gender discussed in the next sections: a male authoritative character.

MALE AUTHORITY FIGURES: MASCULINITY AND POWER

A recurring type of character for Kafka, found in every major story and even most fragments, is the authority figure, who is invariably male. Even in those stories in which women have some authority, there is always a male character holding more authority and power over the main character. Previous critical literature has mostly focused on fathers (or the uncle in *The Trial*), who are always authority figures, probably the most complex, but I argue that their role is not different from those instances in which the authority figures are employers, friends and colleagues of the main character, as well as a vast number of generic, un-defined men. These characters are usually older than the main character, do not have anyone more powerful than them and display stereotypically masculine features: they are strong, very practical and are, or were, hard workers, who take care of their families with confidence and strength. They perform their masculine role without questioning the social standards that put them in their dominant role. Their perversion is the main character, who, although male, is never an authority figure, even when he appears to be: although Kafka's protagonists often work in high level positions, their fate is always to suffer some perverted event that shows how weak and dependant on others they are. In *The Country Doctor* the title character is the best example of how a higher social position does not mean more power.

The story is about a doctor who is called in the middle of the night to take care of a patient who is first thought to be barely sick, but on second inspection reveals a deep, deadly wound. Incapable of healing the patient, the doctor is then forced by the whole village to lie naked next to him like a sacrificial victim in a vampiric healing ritual. Although the doctor manages to escape, the story ends with the whole village following him. At the beginning of the story, the doctor is left without horses and cannot go to his patient. A groom appears from the stables and brings two splendid horses before bashing the door open to rape the doctor's maid. The groom belongs to a lower status than the doctor, but is more authoritative because he displays a higher masculine power to which the doctor cannot oppose himself. Through his stereotypical virility and strength, he able to break the door of a house in a matter of seconds and barehanded. Several critics[265] have already mentioned that the groom is a representation of the doctor's subconscious, the personification of what he is not. He is violent, strong and manages to stay home for the night while imposing himself sexually on the maid. These are all expected standards in a predominantly masculine society that needs to be constantly re-affirmed through strength and to limit women's increasing independence. When the groom appears out of nowhere,his presence is not questioned, being as a symbol of the male standards lacking in the doctor. His presence shows that the doctor is perverted, out of place in the world he is living in. Another example of masculine power trumping social power are the villagers lead by the patient's family, whose father is more relevant than anyone else. They are all simple people who value rum as much as a treasure, but nonetheless feel they have the right to subdue the doctor both physically and morally. Even the horses, whose virility is pointed out at the start of the story, decide when to leave without waiting the doctor's command. Finally, the patient gives the doctor

[264] Austin, *How to do Things with Words*.

[265] See, among others, Etti Golomb-Bregman, "No Rose Without Thorns: Ambivalence in Kafka's 'A Country Doctor'," *American Imago* 46, no.1 (1989): 77-84.

the final blow by saying he had never had any confidence in him and forcing the doctor to justify himself by stressing his experience, proving that even the person who was supposed to be helped has more power than the helper. The doctor is effective in his performance as a doctor, but his performance as a male is perverted, as he does not show any power or strength and is constantly subdued by other males, who perform their roles according to the story's standard, but perversely in our eyes.

This story supports Lorenz's suggestion that male characters explore "the full range of male gender stereotypes, including the unheroic, irresolute, and effeminate configuration of Jewish masculinity [...] and the rough male type".[266] Lorenz gives a few textual examples of the last two, but I would add that the unheroic, irresolute and effeminate are almost always the main characters. Walter Müller-Seidel makes a similar point in his critical analysis of the *Letter to his Father*, in which he defines Kafka's heroes as weak, opposed to the "right of the stronger" (*Recht der Stärkeren*).[267] In the same article, he also shows how Kafka sees himself as the sick, weak hero of modern literature, seen as small from his father's point of view. Kafka himself makes the same contraposition while talking about his father showing his big body to the skinny son while getting changed in a cabin: "There was I, skinny, weakly, slight; you strong, tall, broad".[268] The difference in importance and size is also conveyed through the use of the capitalized *Du/Dich* throughout the letter. Used in this way, the pronoun is more formal than the non-capitalized version, but not as formal as *Sie*, which would also have been common to refer to a father with deference. Kafka in this way conveys an attempt to be close to his father, but yet not in the same position, physically and morally. Going back to the story, the patient is brought as an example of the feminine, but I argue that he is part of the doctor himself,[269] who lost his feminine counterpart with the loss of Rosa and substitutes it with a sick (again, symbol of the feminine) man, in a confusion of roles.

Other male figures impose themselves on the main characters throughout Kafka's literature thanks to their manly behaviour, regardless of their roles. The two guards arresting Josef K. in *The Trial* are confident and threatening, manage to order Josef what to do even if they don't have any official role and thus have no real authority over him. In Welles' adaptation, the guards are in a first instance replaced by the inspector, played by Arnoldo Foà who imposes his power though a Bogart-esque interpretation, another actor famous for his stereotypical masculinity used as a means to impose his role. In the novel, only the guards' superior and the flogger hired to beat them for stealing Josef's food overcome them, as they display even more masculine power through the use of weapons and physical strength. The flogger also shows lack of mercy, K.'s feminine trait, because part of a masculine performance is to do one's job without exceptions, particularly when following the demands of the Law. The flogger shows Kafka's view of a reckless power like Gregor's superior in *The Metamorphosis*: authority is omnipresent and is always imposed on the weaker. Gregor's chief, in fact goes out of his way to visit his missing employee at home, annoyed by the inexcusable absence that not even an illness can justify. This event tells the reader how a man's personal life, here represented by the house and Gregor's room, does not have the priority over the masculine trait of work: having a higher position in the company's hierarchy automatically means having a higher position in every field of life, as Gregor knows.

> Why did Gregor have to be the only one condemned to work for a company where they immediately became highly suspicious at the slightest shortcoming? Were all employees, every one of them, louts,

[266] Lorenz, *Kafka and Gender*, 176.
[267] Müller-Seidel, *Franz Kafkas 'Brief an den Vater'*.
[268] Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 28.
[269] Henry Sussman, "Symmetry and Disaster in "A Country Doctor"" in *Franz Kafka*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 53-64.

> was there not one of them who was faithful and devoted who would go so mad with pangs of conscience that he couldn't get out of bed if he didn't spend at least a couple of hours in the morning on company business? Was it really not enough to let one of the trainees make enquiries - assuming enquiries were even necessary - did the chief clerk have to come himself, and did they have to show the whole, innocent family that this was so suspicious that only the chief clerk could be trusted to have the wisdom to investigate it?[270]

For the same reason, Mr. Samsa asks Gregor to open the room door to speak with the chief clerk, hoping he will be kind enough to excuse Gregor's untidy room. If the room represents the refuge that can only be partially touched by the people Gregor loves the most in an attempt to help him (only the mother and sister enter without using violence, as the maid does, and only to get rid of the furniture in the attempt to help Gregor move around) and Gregor's deepest world, the fact the chief clerk would have the right to judge its untidiness only shows the perverted invasion of the working environment over the person as an individual. As work is a male feature, a non-working individual like Gregor is not a male any longer. Illness does not justify a day off, because, as mentioned, illness is a feminine trait and would therefore indicate an intrusion of roles if it took priority over masculine traits, like Gregor is allowing to happen. The importance of keeping the job is such that Gregor shows the reader the perversion of this situation in its entirety by trying to open the door as an insect, while reasoning about the course of action as if he was a human. Gregor's fear is therefore not related to the supernatural situation he is in, but to the fact that his chief is now the most authoritative, manly person in the house and is making Gregor appear inferior to him in front of the family that relies on Gregor's masculinity to survive.

In the film adaptation *Prevraschenie* (2002), the chief clerk's authoritative status and exclusive attention to the job is well understood by the director, who, echoing the suspenseful anticipation of virile action of films like *The Terminator*, places the camera over the shoulder of the actor playing the chief clerk and has him move very slowly towards the bedroom, while Gregor's parents walk backwards, scared by the exceptional event and the authority figure's presence. The masculinity is stressed by the posture and strong traits. His face barely moves when he speaks, reminding us of a robot whose sole goal is to capture his victim. The exaggeration of authority and power is so evident that the effect is almost comical and the words reflect this, too. When explaining Gregor's mother that not even illness can justify absence, the chief uses the elaborated expression: "Но, с другой стороны, нам, комерсантам, к счастью или к несчастью - приходится превозмогать легкий недуг" (however, on the other side, fortunately or unfortunately we businessmen have to conquer light diseases), instead of something more common, like "ты должен ходить на работу, даже если ты болен" (one needs to go to work even when one is sick). The expression has the double goal to elevate the speaker above the family with his authority and to stress the importance of work while placing it on the same level of a mission. The character's language is in contrast with that of the scared family with high-level and unnecessarily long sentences and expressions like "Вы заперлись в своей комнате, доставляете вашим родителям тяжелые, ненужные волнения и уклоняетесь, упомину об этом лишь вскользь, от ваших служебных обязанностей самым неслыханным образом" (What is the matter, Mr Samsa? You locked yourself in your room, cause heavy and unnecessary disturbance to your parents and dodge, I am mentioning it only in passing, your official duties in the most unheard-of manner) and "весьма и весьма" (an articulate way of saying "very", that could be more easily replaced by "очень"). The chief's scary

[270] Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and other stories*, 83.

façade starts changing after hearing the unexpected sounds coming from the room and, after seeing the vermin, the chief clerk, both in the story and in its adaptation, runs in fear and disgust. Only a perversion that annihilates what is considered normal and expected can be the reason for a man not to give priority to his job. By running away, the chief clerk is confirming that what he has seen is perverted and what is perverted cannot belong, by definition, to something as normal and fundamental for Kafka's mechanism of the world as a job: with the chief's flight, the reader knows Gregor has officially lost his work and therefore his manliness, both in the sense of "humanity" and in the sense of "male role". It is not a coincidence that the first part of the story ends with Gregor sent back to his room by his father. Gregor is not manly anymore, his performative space is in a closet and the new man in the house, the father, acts bravely, sending his feminine son back to a confined space.

The authoritative performance of Herr Samsa who retakes his role as the masculine chief of the house is symbolic for the imposition of unquestionable social standards coming from the previous generation and is potentially the most representative examples of one specific kind of authority figures in Kafka's narrative: fathers.

AUTHORITY FIGURES - FATHERS

Authority figures are more detailed and specific when they are the main character's father. This is very likely to be caused by Kafka's own relationship with his father, but, whatever the reason, I show here how fatherly figures have male roles while at the same time being the victim of subtle derision. The irony is a result of the feminization of their performances, but it only lasts until the main perverted event of the story, which gives them new vitality and reinstates their male, authoritarian role. Complex characters of fathers appear in the three stories that Kafka wanted to publish under the title *The Sons*[271] and are *The Stoker*, that later became the first chapter of *Amerika* and in which the father's action are related even if he never appears as a character, *The Metamorphosis* and *The Judgment*.

The three fathers are strong figures that, at some point in the story, impose their will and determine the destiny of the main character. In *The Judgment* and *The Metamorphosis*, the two fathers used to be hard workers, who have been replaced by their sons. With the loss of a male role, they lose their vitality. In the final part of her essay, Lorenz observes that the father of *The Judgment*, who is a widower, occupies the role of both Georg's father and mother, as is apparent by the initial state of weakness. Nonetheless, Lorenz also suggests that Georg, in taking care of his father, in a sense replaces his own mother in a sort of successful homosexual incest situation with his father. In my view, the perversion of roles goes further than that. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the father is described as a baby until he reaches the bed. He is incapable of providing for himself and therefore Georg replaces his own mother, but even his father's mother and wife, by taking the stereotypically female role of nurturer. The main character is again perverting his gender role by being a male with female performances. The difference between Georg's and his father's female performance is in the acknowledgment of weakness and sickness in the father, opposed to the apparent health of the son. Both of them pervert their gender by displaying features of the other, but only the father has visibly lost his might, while Georg appears to be male by working and being healthy. Lorenz also observes that the father's scar, revealed when he mocks Georg's fiancée, can be read as the symbol of female genitalia. Like the patient's wound in *A Country Doctor*, the scar may represent a vagina, but there are two main differences: the description is not as detailed and clearly vaginal as that of the wound and the scar is a *closed* wound. Thus, if we are to see a wound as a symbol for femininity, the scar, showed when the father has already re-taken his male dominant role, shows that the weak and "feminine" features

[271] Kafka reveals this intention in a letter to his editor Kurt Wolff. See Brod, *Letters to Friend, Family and Editors,* letter dated 11/04/1913.

are now gone. Finally, Kafka also clarifies that the scar dates "from his war years".[272] The father was a soldier, another manly feature, and his virility is asserted even when he is mocking a womanly behaviour. This example shows a very significant instance in which the father's whole gender performance changes, thus showing how fathers' genders are characterized by an impermanent mode.[273] Georg's father shifts from a stereotypically female performance at the beginning of the story and, through another stereotypically feminine act like hysteria, gets the power and dominance of a man. The wound-vagina is now closed and the manly strength is regained.

The passive father is a figure that Kafka uses to mock the power that he so much detested in his total lack of vanity.[274] The impotence of the fathers at the start of different stories becomes clear when we accept that they do not inhabit the male role. The manly role of bread-winners is now over for them: even if they do not have any specific illness or condition, they are too weak to work. So weak, in fact, that they spend their time in a semi-comatose state, always on the verge of sleep. At some point, thanks to a perverted act, they take some power back in what Eric Santner defines as a resurrection,[275] in which the fathers retain some of their weakness. Saul Friedländer disagrees with this notion,[276] saying that the father of *The Judgment* does not show any sign of hesitation after his power has been established and Herr Samsa is not hesitating when he asks his wife and daughter what to do with Gregor. However, Santner seems to have a point, as, at the end of *The Judgment*, the father falls on the bed, maybe even dead, after using his energy to morally destroy and condemn Georg. Similarly, in *The Metamorphosis*, the episode quoted by Santner shows how Grete has more decisional power than her father, who is now again less powerful than one of his children, as he was at the beginning of the story. In *Prevraschenie*, the first ten minutes are an addition to the story and show Samsa family's life the night before the transformation. The father falls asleep while Grete is playing the violin for the family and is opposed to Gregor, who, after a day of work, is vital, happy and pleasant with all the women of the family. The father's sleep, that of an old man bored by his own daughter, is diametrically different from the elegant sleep he will have later in the film: that of a tired man who has been working for the whole day and needs some rest.

Belonging to the standard of masculinity, the fathers stripped of their male performances are also useless in female roles. They do not help in the house nor do any other activity that would usually be attributed to a woman. Herr Samsa has no authority in the house, too: the maids are allowed to do what they please until the end, when the aggressive maid is told off and sent away, characterizing his newly found manhood. In *The Judgment*, Georg's father is even incapable of taking care of his basic hygiene and his childish behaviour underlines his uselessness as an adult. The perversion of these figures lies in their existence without any strongly defined role outside of the perverted event: if it is impossible to define gender without a superimposed performance, the fathers are characters that cannot perform unless a perversion saves them. When the perverted event takes place, the fathers become strong again in a parasitic act of energy drain: the less masculine Gregor and Georg become, the more masculine are the two fathers, as Kafka shows in a visual style. Gregor's father wears a uniform, a symbol of discipline and strength, and goes back to work when his son can only wear a carapax and remain confined in an empty room. Georg's father stands on the bed in an exaggerated, manneristic pose and shouts orders, while his son crawls in a corner and can only whisper pathetic comebacks.

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[272] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, 45.

[273] For an explanation of impermanence in gender, see Karen Yescavage and Jonathan Alexander, *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others* (New York: Routledge, 2012). "Impermanence [... suggests] the mutability of gender and sexuality as identity constructs" (14).

[274] Elias Canetti, *Kafka's Other Trial: The Letters to Felice* (New York: Schocken, 1988).

[275] Eric Santner, "Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' and the Writing of Abjection," in *The Metamorphosis*, ed. Stanley Corngold (New York: Norton, 1996), 195-210.

[276] Friedländer, *Franz Kafka: Poet of Shame and Guilt*.

Finally, the fathers' weakness hides a sadistic behaviour towards their sons, which can only be exposed is exposed after the perverted event, when the roles are swapped. Before the transformation, Herr Samsa is powerless: nothing lets us think there is anything other than a cold relationship between father and son. His resentment towards Gregor for having become the only person to take care of the family because of his father's debts can only be expressed with the passive-aggressive act of hiding money from the family. Like the father of *The Judgment*, who hides the letters to Georg's friends and humiliates his son with them, Mr. Samsa is only looking for the best moment to show he has not lost his power and become again the strongest, manliest character of the story, but this can only happen once the energy has been sucked from the son. After the perverted events, the fathers perform their manliness also using physical force: in *The Metamorphosis* Gregor is forcefully sent back to his room on three different occasions and, in *The Judgment*, the father majestically stands on the bed, throwing away the well-tucked sheets in a single movement.

From a performative point of view, Kafka's father characters are quite straightforward and one-sided and are not particularly interesting if performed in a contemporary, realistic fashion. In his *Meditations on Metamorphosis*, Berkoff tells how difficult it was in every production of the adaptation to find an actor capable of playing the father.[277] Clearly the acting style used for every other character is not effective for this character (and for all the similar ones). Considering that they do not have much middle ground and are either passive or strong and oppressive without much humanization, these characters could be better portrayed by character actors, if not by actors experienced with masks and *Commedia dell'Arte*, as all of these styles usually do not require emotional changes within the story and to be larger than life.

Main male characters display, as we have seen so far more than once, both male and female features. So far, I have discussed only male standards and behaviour, that are mostly linked to power, so, before exploring male main characters, a discussion about Kafka's female characters is needed.

FEMALE CHARACTERS

In her comment on Begley's biography of Kafka, Zadie Smith claimed the writer's behaviour towards women was "a perfectly ordinary expression of misogyny [...] Kafka's mind was like that, it went wondrous fast- still, when it came to women, it went as fast as the times allowed".[278] This analysis seems to be partial, at best, considering it is only based on a reading of the letters to Felice that, according to Boa "open up a persona and historical context which adds resonance to the fictions".[279] Nonetheless, a superficial analysis of the characters could lead to this idea: in Kafka's stories, with one exception, female characters are never the protagonists and there are two possible standards for them. In this section I discuss the representation of female gender through the transition towards sexuality in female character. Women either belong to the a-sexual mother or to the sexual worker. The main differences between the two are age and how prominent are their erotic and sexual dispositions. Lorenz explains how women, in Kafka's time, were gaining civil and political rights, how "Gender roles shifted as they had never before as new educational and employment opportunities for women opened"[280] and thus why Kafka wrote about independent female characters. She shows how most women do not have a father figure and how Kafka "undermines the traditional literary paradigm according to which a woman's sexual encounters end in marriage or tragedy".[281] Kafka was living in times in which the female

[277] Berkoff, *Meditations on Metamorphosis*.

[278] Zadie Smith, "F. Kafka, Everyman," *The New York Review of Books*, July 17, 2008, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/07/17/f-kafka-everyman/.

[279] Boa, *Franz Kafka: Gender, Class and Race*, 45.

[280] Ibid., 170.

[281] Ibid., 173.

gender standard was being challenged and getting closer to the male, but the opposite was not happening. As observed in the previous section, fathers with masculine attitude could dominate over the younger sons when these were not masculine enough, but mothers did not have the same approach to their daughters. Kafka portrayed the perversion of previous female standards happening in his time by showing independence, sexualisation and a form of opposition to imposed masculinity. This use of the traits of the new woman creates an interesting tension with Kafka's biography: although he can take a feminist perspective, as a child of his time, Kafka displays misogynistic behaviour in some of his personal writings. According to Janouch, Kafka maintained that "women are snares, which lie in wait for men on all sides in order to drag them into the merely finite".[282] This contrast is further evidence of Kafka's dualism between the standard of gender and its rejection. I do not intend to downplay or ignore the misogyny demonstrated in Kafka's personal life, but for the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the position taken in Kafka's art, in which gender performance is fluid and does not bring to any clear separation.

Politzer sees a rejection of femininity in Kafka's characters and even claimed a positive comparison in the use of female sex between Kafka and Weininger,[283] according to whom female emancipation had to be stopped to keep the distinction between the two genders. Although there is an influence of masculine standards in Kafka's female characters, they always keep their female features and therefore it is not entirely correct to claim that gender boundaries are indistinct. The only fusions of gender performances can only be observed in the main characters. Gerald Stieg also compares Kafka's female figures to Weininger's women, but does so in a different way. The parallel is appropriate in light of the consideration that, in Otto Weininger's view, every individual has a certain and variable amount of maleness and femaleness and this leads to a more male or female behaviour. Those women who comply with their set duties have a high amount of "femaleness" and cannot be understood by men, while those women trying to emancipate themselves have more "maleness" in them.[284] This emancipation is showed by Kafka with sexual tension (italics are in the original):

> Weininger's "unethical" woman appears in two forms that emerge in *The Castle*: (1) the *human* (i.e., the whore), and (2) the *bestial* (i.e., the mother). The significance of prostitute and mother figures (among them, the enigmatic Madonna-like girl from the Castle) is clear, as well as the meaning of the unusual role of the "female monk" (*Mönchin*) Amalia.[285]

Identifying the second category with the mother and the monk is a reminder of what has been said in the second chapter about Kafka's asexual view of the married couple, his disgust for a bed in which sexual acts have been committed and his mother's portrayal in *Letter to His Father*. Her description is antithetical to that of the father: she spoils her son while he shouts at him, she finds an excuse to leave the table when the topic is becoming too sexual, she suffers in silence while the rest of the family fights, but ultimately, and always more as the years go by, stands on her husband's side and is devoted to him. All these characteristics belong to motherly figures in the stories and indicate how a woman is supposed to perform if she wants to belong to her gender.

The misogynistic view is only superficial: if we contextualize Kafka's view, as Dagmar Lorenz's does, we understand Kafka was representing a changing society in which women were

[282] Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 178.
[283] Heinz Politzer, *Kafka: Parable and Paradox* (Cornell UP, 1966), 199.
[284] Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
[285] Stieg, "Kafka and Weininger," 202.

gaining independence, starting with his fiancé Felice, who was working at the *Technische Werkstaette Berlin* and contributing to her family's income. Some of Kafka's women are strong characters, a mirror of his age, capable of making choices and not always connected to a man. Lorenz does not address the fact, as Torton Beck partially does, that women still seems to be in subordinate positions to male power[286] and sometimes are taken advantage of by men. This is partially confirmed by the fact that sexual female characters never enter by themselves the main character's room (i.e. his emotional privacy), indicating the utilitarian approach to sex used by Kafka's alter-egos. In *Prevraschenie*, the sexual nature of Kafka's rooms is indicated at the beginning of the film, when Gregor's sister stands on the entrance and kisses her brother on the lips. This way, the director shows the para-incestuous relationship of the siblings, but also the liminal nature of relationships between Kafka's women and sex. Those female characters that do not imply anything sexual or refuse sexuality as a tool to achieve their goals are the only ones allowed into the main character's room for practical matters and without needing to resort to violence. When they are not explicitly mothers, the non-sexualised female characters are still caretakers. This could place them under the "mother" category, but they are actually a perverted type of mothers, who, instead of caring for the house out of love, they do it out of personal interest and don't show any genuine affection. The maid of *The Metamorphosis* tries to become the leader of the house and reacts to Gregor's dead body with happiness before throwing him away like garbage. Elizabeth Boa shows how Frau Grubach, the landlady in *The Trial*, is helpful and polite not because of gentleness, but of a business mentality. A degree of affection towards her lodger is recognized, but it is secondary and potentially due only to an unsatisfied wish to be mother:

> As a middle-class client paying for a service Josef K. is Frau Grubach's superior. But landladies are notorious dragons: they render services against money and depends on the lodgers for their living, yet they head households as guardians of decency ready to punish disorderly tenants [...] Frau Grubach's power as head of a household, earner of money, and guardian of decency is undermined by the servility with which she performs typically feminine tasks [...] and by her maternal affection towards a young man.[287]

In partial disagreement with Torton Beck, I maintain that the subordination of female characters to male is only apparent and is still dependent on the sexual features of female characters. Extreme sexualisation is another way in which Kafka portrays the perversion of previous standards: as he realized women were gaining more independence, he adds them a sexual side that the previous generation could not have, in his view, because the holiness of mothers would have contrasted with the aversion Kafka has for sex. Women sexualisation is also a way to recognize their right to freely make their own choices about partners and sex, like Fraülein Bürstner does when she rejects Josef K. However, this is not everything they are: these characters are also independent workers who pay for themselves. Admittedly, there is an element of abuse towards women, but they show an emotional and intellectual maturity that allows them to enact revenge against the abuser (like the angry reaction Leni has when Josef K. shows up at the lawyer's door in the middle of the night, in *The Trial*). Furthermore, we cannot forget that the sexual and relational independence we see nowadays cannot be compared to that of Kafka's time, when it was only beginning: we need to "see how his own vision grows out of his life experiences, rooted as they are in gender, sexuality, religion and culture".[288]

[286] Torton Beck, *Kafka's Traffic in Women*, 565-567.
[287] Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class and Race,* 190-191.
[288] Torton Beck, *Kafka's Triple Bind.*

In the previous chapter I discussed Kafka's relationship with sex, seen as a dirty act, the price to pay for the pleasure of being together. His view of sex is mirrored in sexual relationships between the main characters and young women, where feelings are not the main component, although it is hard to say who is using whom. Clear metaphors of Kafka's own approach to sex and examples for sexual independence are the libertine and progressive, for the time, women in *The Trial*. Josef shows some romantic interest in Fraülein Bürstner (who has the same initials as Felice Bauer, stressing the autobiographical description of the relationship) and it is never clear if they have ever had any sex or not. She is a worker, an independent woman who is allowed to choose her partner, while Leni, a lower-class worker, is bound to fall in (a purely erotic) love with anyone who has been arrested. The girls in Titorelli's atelier of *The Trial*, although young and childish in their behaviour, are learning how to become women, observe the painter and Josef through the bars of the painter's room with a voyeuristic desire, speak with Titorelli in a flirtatious tone and, in the deleted scene mentioned before, are happy to learn how to seduce a man. In the 1962 adaptation of the movie, Orson Welles explicitly sexualises the girls, choosing attractive actresses who were older than the age they were interpreting, but dressed like young girls. In doing so, he arouses an erotic interest in the viewer, who, identifying with Josef, is attracted by children and annoyed by them at the same time.

Women of the new generation pervert the "mother" standards, but at the same time clearly belong to the female gender, as they all keep the standard of nurturers and carers. Fraülein Bürstner is happy to let Josef unload and re-enact his tale even if she is tired and worried for the other guests. Leni is a nurse and shows care for her patient. Grete in *The Metamorphosis* is the first to think about her brother's needs. At the same time, she is the best example of the perversion of gender performance as she mirrors the protagonist's perversion. In the 2012 adaptation, after the chief clerk has run away and Gregor's father has sent Gregor back to his room and before fading to the next scene in Gregor's room, a seemingly analogic cut from the insect to Grete's worried face suggests the two are linked. Together with Gregor, Grete also suffers a metamorphosis, going from female to male in her gender performance and then concluding the story as a "new woman". Through the killing of her brother, she represents the re-birth, perceived as perverted by some male-dominated parts of society, of women as people with different gender roles. Gregor's death is the cause of Grete's re-birth, but at the same time it is its consequence. As a symbol of a new generation of men, Gregor cannot cope with the social battle caused by the re-consideration of gender and the feminist movements advocating for better social conditions for women. The "new woman" was perceived as a threat and caused a crisis in masculinity, as "masculinist" authors like Mackay and Kupffer show in their antimodernist, misogynist narrative.[289] However, Gregor is not an advocate for traditionalist behaviour, nor strong enough to cope with the change -one more way in which Kafka shows to be a child of his time, but also an unknowing precursor of future social perspectives. As a symbol of a new gender perspective, Gregor is similar to Grete, but opposite to her and as such they cannot co-exist: if one is re-born as a new creature, the other, who has literally been a new creature for the whole story, must die. The similarity between the two characters starts from the fact they are the only two characters referred to with their names and who also have similar names. At the beginning, Grete performs according to the accepted female standards: she depends on Gregor for her life, like the rest of the family, she is passionate about art, but needs her brother to fully develop this passion and helps the mother in the stereotypically feminine roles around the house, learning how to become a female. However, with time, her behaviour changes and her metamorphosis (i.e. the perversion of her gender) begins: she forgets to bring food to Gregor, stops playing music and works outside of the house to help the father provide for the family. She essentially performs the role of a man, while still keeping some of her female duties and her external appearance.

[289] Robert Deam Tobin, *Peripheral Desires: The German Discovery of Sex* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2015).

Prevraschenie shows this change very clearly by giving Grete a uniform, a tidier, less feminine haircut and a less childish behaviour. When Gregor stops Grete from playing the violin in front of the lodgers, her last female performance, simply by showing up in his insect form, she shows she has another manly attribute: strength. When the lodgers leave, Grete takes the word, slams her fists on the table (a loud noise opposed to the whispers she used to talk with Gregor at the beginning of the story) and takes a decision only the *pater familias* could take: to cast away a family member. Her father agrees, but she has clearly become the decision maker. The perversion of gender comes again into play when she starts crying, a female action, while still declaring her decision to be final, a male action. Her performance is so confused that it even stops being a clear imitation of a gender, thus becoming a perverted performance. Her evolution is complete in the third part of the story, where, having become a female character with male responsibilities, he starts being referred to as "Gregor's sister", like the rest of the family, until the end. With Gregor's death, Grete starts being seen as a grown woman of a new generation. The "otherness" of the family was hidden in a closet, but, now that it is dead, the closet can be opened again. Mr. Samsa, now again in his male performance, acts powerfully against the lodgers and sends them away "without letting go of the women" (in a beautiful contrast of the verbs *verlassen* used for the lodgers and its opposit *ohne zu lassen* for the women, in both cases stressing Herr Samsa's decisional power)[290] fires the maid and demands attention from the women of the house. In the same way, Grete performs the duties expected of her gender again: she is emotionally disturbed by the maid's bad behaviour, she kisses and hugs her father, has red cheeks again and is even ready for a husband.

The last sections show Kafka's understanding of male and female social standards allowing the proper performance of gender in his social context. His literature describes otherness, distancing from standards, perversions, all of which is personified in his main characters, that so far have been described as an accessory to powerful males and evolving females. The next section focuses on the performance of main characters, whose perversion of gender can be seen as a third gender.

MAIN CHARACTERS: PERFORMANCE OF THE PERVERTED GENDER

All the gender discourses I have referred to so far and the performance of perversion culminate in Kafka's main characters, who show elements of both genders and cannot be easily located within either gender. Therefore, his characters belong to a "third gender" that challenges the expectations of genders performing according to biological sex. I have already showed in the previous sections that Kafka's main characters display features normally expected by both genders. In this section I add food as a performative element of the third gender. Also, I discuss a possible interpretation of food as a tool for Kafka's inner search and how food is comparable to gender. Through the food symbolism and the use of features of more than one gender in the same individual, Kafka's search for a deeper identity makes him a precursor of gender as a fluid concept, the performance of which should not be dictated by social standards. What I argue here is that Kafka manages to abandon the performance of the dichotomy male/female or man/woman through the use of perversions that see his main characters transcend traditional performances of gender. Through gender perversion and in the search for answers about identity, Kafka attempts to offer a solution to the apparently static binarism masculine/feminine.

The association made by Kafka between power, masculinity and food (or at least eating habits) started from his childhood, recollected in the following quote, in which he reminds his father how rules were set at the table and not followed by the rule-giver himself, who underlined his power through his strong appetite:

[290] Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, 123.

> Since as a child I was with you chiefly during meals, your teaching was to a large extent the teaching of proper behaviour at table. What was brought to the table had to be eaten, the quality of the food was not to be discussed—but you yourself often found the food inedible, called it "this swill," said "that cow" (the cook) had ruined it. Because in accordance with your strong appetite and your particular predilection you ate everything fast, hot, and in big mouthfuls, the child had to hurry; there was a somber silence at table, interrupted by admonitions: "Eat first, talk afterward," or "faster, faster, faster," or "There you are, you see, I finished ages ago." Bones mustn't be cracked with the teeth, but you could. Vinegar must not be sipped noisily, but you could. The main thing was that the bread should be cut straight. But it didn't matter that you did it with a knife dripping with gravy. Care had to be taken that no scraps fell on the floor. In the end it was under your chair that there were the most scraps. At table one wasn't allowed to do anything but eat, but you cleaned and cut your fingernails, sharpened pencils, cleaned your ears with a toothpick.[291]

This quote underlines how Kafka associates the father's power and masculinity with his eating habits and the rules set at table. The highest power is the one that can contravene its own rules, but also needs to establish its power through a performance of strength, speed and resilience to pain. A meat-eater like Kafka's father is powerful and masculine, does not need to follow any rule while eating and is opposed to the weak, feminine vegetarian who, like Gregor after the transformation, prefers inedible dairy products, traditionally associated with females, to anything that is non-vegetarian. Heather Merle Benbow makes a convincing case in showing the "meat-masculinity-power"[292] association in Kafka's works. Food is gendered: those who eat meat are men (in some cases soldiers) and healthy, while those who eat something else are emasculated, perverted like Gregor as an insect or the hunger artist. The hunger artist's de-masculinization is shown by Benbow through the lack of masculine meat, and the pleasure in providing for the guardians who did a good job by buying them food, like a woman belonging to the "mother" category would do.

Even some of the shortest stories present food as something that is not needed, unless some specific food (i.e. a resolution of the perverted situation presented in the story) could be found. The parable *My Destination* shows it clearly:

> I gave orders for my horse to be brought round from the stables. The servant did not understand me. I myself went to the stable, saddled my horse and mounted. In the distance I heard a bugle call, I asked him what this meant. He knew nothing and had heard nothing. At the gate he stopped me, asking: "Where are you riding to, master?" "I don't know," I said, "only away from here, away from here. Always away from here, only by doing so can I reach my destination." "And so you know your destination?" he asked. "Yes," I answered, "didn't I say so? Away-From-Here, that is my destination." "You have no provisions with you," he said. "I need none," I said, "the journey is so long that I must die of hunger if

[291] Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 14

[292] Heather Merle Benbow, "'Was auf den Tisch kamm, musste aufgegessen [...] werden': Food, Gender and Power in Kafka," *The German Quarterly* 79, no.3 (2006): 347-365.

> I don't get anything on the way. No provisions can save me. For it is, fortunately, a truly immense journey".[293]

The speaker is on an eternal journey: every place in which he will be, will be a new *hier* he must go away from. His destination will be reached only if he finds an absurd *nicht-hier*, where he does not need to go away from and can probably even stop long enough to get food. If he did, the food would allow him not to accomplish the destiny indicated in that *muss*: die of hunger. However, this is impossible, thus indicating that a communion with food and whatever food represents is impossible, too. The fact that this is a parable, together with the acknowledgment that Kafka was on a constant search for better spiritual knowledge,[294] sheds further light on the use of food. If food is what prevents from a better knowledge and is so highly gendered, getting rid of it means also to get rid of stereotypical gender associations to reach a higher knowledge. So-called "holy men" are often associated with fasting; even Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights before being tempted by the devil with material possessions and food. The reason food is considered an obstacle to deep knowledge is not only to indicate that the holier one is, the less physical needs one has, but also that a common and disgusting act like that of producing waste is not committed:

> The boundary between the inner and outer is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit.[295]

The *Hunger Artist*, from this point of view the holiest of characters, suffers when he is given food, meaning he is stopped in his becoming only "inner". At the end of his life and career, when he is so thin he can hide under the canape, there is nothing inside of him that can become an "outer", while, at the same time, he himself cannot become food and waste. In the chapter entitled *Gynophagy*, Ellmann shows how fasting is, stereotypically, a feminine activity. By identifying his male main characters (even when animals, they are grammatically referred to in the masculine) with a female act, Kafka is perverting one key aspect of his characters' sex. Fasting becomes so important to some of them that they become known because of it (like the artist) or their fate is sealed by it (as in the case of Gregor, who dies of starvation). Biology is received by the subject, not chosen, so by identifying a biologically male character through a conscious female choice, according to Kafka, the real self can come out. Real selves are not dependant on social rules and standards and therefore their performances are perverted when gender standards are applied. By deconstructing gender through a series of performances and perversions, Kafka gets rid of classifications and categories, at least in his alter-egos. Torton Beck makes a rather convincing case when she discusses the option that Kafka was a closeted homosexual who projected this on his writings[296] and Saul Friedländer adds more elements to confirm the hypothesis. Given Kafka's environment, coming out of the closet would have been difficult, but if this is due to repression, cultural taboo or any other reason is irrelevant. What is relevant is the representation of main characters resembling the queer features discussed above, whose identity is not different from that of males or females, but whose performance needs features of both.

The deleted passage of *The Trial* mentioned earlier further suggests that gender identity is one of the standards put into question when the perverted situation happens. The story until

[293] Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 189.
[294] Brod, *Franz Kafka*.
[295] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 70.
[296] Torton Beck, *Kafka's Triple Bind: Women, Jews and Sexuality*.

that point shows an evolution of sexuality: after showing his love for one girl and accepting the erotic, but purely animal, advances of another, Josef fantasizes with pleasure about homoeroticism in a closet.[297] The girls, symbol of womanhood, are outside, laugh at him, but are not welcome in the closet. The lack of a judge (although Titorelli is the judges' painter, there is no painting of any judge in the room) indicates that this closet, as opposed to that in which Leni was, is not under the control of the Law and no one would know if he showed to be guilty. Kafka's main character need a perverted situation to find their identity and in their journey everything that is related to physicality changes and their performances become perverted because they leave social standards. The closets they have been living in are now open and they need to deal with a world made of standards that sees them as perverted. Kafka's main characters display male and female features that were uncommon at the time and therefore find themselves in a neutral position. Like the concept advocated by the gender scholars described at the beginning of the chapter, Kafka's main character transcend dichotomies like male/female and heterosexual/homosexual and show how perversions exist within standards-filled societies.

The performance of gender comprises social expectations and affects individuals, but Kafka expands the perspective and perverts the standards causing another socially created dichotomy determining everyone's approach to the "otherness": humanity and animality.

[297] Richard T. Gray, Ruth V. Gross, Rolf J. Goebel and Cayton Koelb, *A Franz Kafka Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2005), 130.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERVERSION OF HUMANITY

INTRODUCTION

So far, this research has touched several times the topic of how Kafka perverts standards in the attempt to show that identity cannot be defined through them. The perversion of gender explored in the last chapter is the perversion of one of the standards humans use to describe themselves. In this chapter I show how Kafka portrays and perverts humanity (here intended as "the Human") by mixing human and animal characteristics in such a way that their behaviour becomes impossible to distinguish and the duality human/animal is rendered dubious as much as the male/female (false) dichotomy. Because the perversion of standards is meant as a display of reality and not an explicitly ethical issue, Kafka does not go to the extent of suggesting a cancellation of categories, but shows that categories may not be needed, because animality and humanity are not that different, after all, given that members of both categories can behave in comparable ways. The behaviour of humans and animals can be distinguished by the viewer based on their perception, but in reality, only superficial characteristics and social impositions seem to distinguish humans from animals

This fine line between animality and humanity is the same as happens in drag performances, as I show in a later section of this chapter. The following sections will discuss the role and relationship of animals and humans in Kafka's stories. I focus on specific articles and essays before discussing the theatre adaptations of *A Report to an Academy*.

After discussing the anthropocentric view and how this is akin to the gender differentiation discussed in the previous chapter, I stress how animal and human behaviour are still performed and that both animals and humans pervert their socially imposed roles as involuntary performers and voluntary audience by becoming both at the same time. This shifts the responsibility of the anthropocentric gaze onto the reader, who realizes how their perspective of the same standards shapes the attitude towards the world. Finally, in the last section I analyse in detail two theatrical adaptations of the same story, chosen because the same character observes the world both from an animal and a human perspective. Being an adaptation, we are in front of an explicit performance showing how an animal, who lives outside the social standards, is forced to pervert its nature by performing according to social expectation in order not to be fully considered an outsider. From a performative perspective, the work behind it becomes a case study to show what choices are necessary for actors and directors to adapt the visual language and these perverted themes to theatre, essentially performing the performance.

Before discussing the line between animality and humanity and a dichotomy that Kafka shows to be as subtle and arbitrary as that between male and female, it is important to understand the history of representations of animality and humanity, particularly in relation to the question of performance.

ANIMALITY AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Humans are apes. Great apes, to be precise, and we belong to the same family (Hominidae) as gorillas, bonobos and chimpanzees.[298] Our genus is different, but from every other biological point of view we are essentially identical, so what makes us "humans" and them "animals"? Why be specific when talking about ourselves and generic when talking about everything else, even when we share so much? Although we know this, we still refer to people as

[298] This is a well-established fact in taxonomy and there is a plethora of evidence that would be impossible to list.

"animals" to stress a negative, usually excessive and crass behaviour. Comparing someone to a specific animal may be positive, but it is usually a way to reduce a person to one single feature, usually physical, that we associate with that species. What we observe in different ways is an anthropocentric perspective on the world, in which humans dictate the perception of "standard" and "otherness" in a fashion similar to that described by gender studies and mentioned in the last chapter, according to which "male" is the standard and "female" or "queer" is the deviation from it. In her manifesto, Donna Haraway supports "dog writing to be a branch of feminist theory"[299] by showing how dogs are treated as the significant other of humans because of their joint history, while remaining an "other".

I contend that Kafka's literature is neither anthropomorphic nor zoomorphic, because it exclusively deals with the liminal areas and actually challenges categories. Kafka, as I suggest in this section, expands puts the reader in the awkward position of perceiving animals like human, using an anthropocentric position to look at animals at the same level as themselves, thus perverting the performance of humanity by stressing the grey line between animal and human behaviour. If we accept the human/animal dichotomy at its intuitive and face value, at least for the moment, we can acknowledge that we expect animals to perform for us. We pay to go to circuses and zoos, we describe them in zoology texts and we like to observe them perform on stage or in a film. It is not a coincidence that animals started disappearing from human's daily experience together with the development of machines. At the same time, zoos started being more frequent to allow people and animals to meet, making animals performers of their behaviour, albeit in a confined and artificial environment apparently made for the animal's comfort, but actually made for the audience's enjoyment and to which animals need to adapt.

Kafka is aware of the human expectations for an animal show and perverts it: he is conscious that animals are not the only ones who perform for humans, but humans do it too in an animalistic way. Animal and human performances were, and occasionally are, mixed in several instances: the peculiarity of animal looks is the main attraction in a zoo as well as in freak shows, the display of animal stereotypical features (strength, speed, agility and so on) is the same as that of some circus acts and in the same way the show of intelligence, culture and intellectual skills that humans make in some shows (like that of chess games, memory competition and similar) is mimicked by animals who show the same abilities in experiments or performances. Kafka, as we will see in the next paragraphs, realizes how the performance of humanity and animality is not exclusive to either category and therefore they can both be perverted: human and animal behaviour are mirrors of each other, because humans see in animals the quintessence of a feature they aspire to and see human behaviour in animals. As animals and humans share a blurred line, Kafka not only shows how features and behaviours are not exclusive to either, but also makes them converge in the same character.

We commonly refer to the human realm as "society" or "culture", opposed to the animal, "natural" realm, but this is a wide generalization, too wide to be useful: this perspective that attempts to normalize the human perspective "views human cultural traits under a magnifying lens, while reducing all animal traits into a single category [...and] ignores/denies elements of continuity between human and other animal species [...] with the aim of underlining the uniqueness and superiority of human species".[300]Anthropocentrism is not necessarily a way to underline superiority, being a natural consequence of Taylor's "unavoidable anthropomorphism"[301] needed to interact and empathize with animals: before attributing feelings and sensations to something, we need to find similarities with it, making it easier to empathize, for example, with mammals rather than with other families. What are the traits that divide us

[299] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, people and Significant Otherness*, 3.

[300] Sabrina Tonutti, "Anthropocentrism and the Definition of 'Culture' as a Marker of the Human/Animal Divide," in *Anthropocentrism*, ed. Boddice, 185.

[301] Nik Taylor, "Anthropomorphism and the Animal Subject," in *Anthropocentrism*, 265-279.

from our "others"? Biologically, we could argue that only a specific DNA range can be defined as human, but when it comes to social behaviour, the line is blurred: Francesco Remotti suggests the metaphor of the "Rubicon" dividing culture and biology[302], but he does not say what this Rubicon is. Richard Nimmo sees "the division between humans and non-humans [as] a condition of existence of modernity as a form of order and indispensable to its continued coherence and authority".[303] He then compares Durkheim's social analysis with Weber's to find a substantial difference: for Durkheim, the potentially unlimited desires that only humans can have are opposite to the limited ones of animals who only follow their nature, while Weber could contrapose human subjectivity to animal objectivity, respectively "meaning-to-itself" and "matter-to-itself". Castree sees intention and language as a peculiarity of humans,[304] but Law has remarked that "what counts as a person is an *effect generated by a network of heterogeneous, interacting materials* [...] social agents are never located in bodies and bodies alone".[305] In her essay, Sabrina Tonutti briefly mentions various philosophical approaches to the animal/human difference, but all of them use variations of the culture/nature dichotomy that needs to presuppose an ontological opposition between human and non-human animals. The only way to perceive any behaviour as specifically human or non-human is to have an observer evaluating them , but because the observer is human. it becomes impossible to leave the vicious circle of anthropocentrism to define humanity. In 1967, Levi-Strauss recognized in the opposition an attempt to differentiate ourselves from animals.[306] Given that, according to most religions, God gave men the right to name animals and weild power over them; separating "humanity" and "animality" is an anthropocentric need to preserve that power. Given that different species of animals show traits similar to our socially established cultures, though, it is impossible to define an ontological difference and we can only perform a series of conventions that we ourselves have created and judge in the attempt to separate the two realms.

What Kafka shows in his stories is the grey area that separates human and non-human animals, the behaviours that happen regardless of the biology of the actor, as he also does with gender. His stories suggest Goodbody,[307] are zoomorphic, as they present humans in animal forms, although Goodbody also admits that they are fascinated with the zone between animal and human. Humans and animals become each other, pervert the standards established around both categories by swapping some without this being perceived by other characters as an exceptional event. This perceived normality of an exceptional event is part of the perversion. Deleuze and Guattari show how "becoming is not a correspondence between relations [...], a resemblance, an imitation [...] To become is not to progress or regress along a series"[308] and Kafka writes about this every time he uses animals in his stories. The anthropocentric perspective is needed by the reader to understand the animals, to compare them to something known and to empathize with the characters, but Kafka puts animals and humans on the same level, making them perform in similar ways and perverting the view of human superiority. A common (even more so in Kafka's time), but wrong perception of evolution is to understand it as an ontological improvement of a species, but Kafka shows how this is incorrect by attributing different kinds of adaptations to different creatures. Thus, it is not shocking that Gregor transforms into an animal or that jackals talk and plot against humans. The only perverted event that is shocking within

[302] Francesco Remotti, *Antropologia dei Modelli Culturali* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1974).

[303] Richie Nimmo, "The Making of the Human," in *Anthropocentrism*, 62.

[304] Noel Castree, "False Antithesis: Marxism, Nature and Actor-Networks," *Antipode* 34, no.1 (2002), 111-146.

[305] John Law, "Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity," *System Practice 5* (1992): 383.

[306] Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

[307] Axel Goodbody, "Animal Studies: Kafka's Animal Stories," in *Handbook of Ecocentrism and Cultural Ecology,* ed. Hubert Zapf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 249-272.

[308] Deleuze and Guattari, *Becoming Animal*, 87.

Kafka's world is Red Peter's transformation from ape to human in *A Report to an Academy*. In the last section of this chapter I show that the surprise is not related to the event itself, but to the realization that Red Peter has left infancy, the realm of those who do not talk[309] and, by pronouncing his first words, has officially become a (male) adult.

The division between nature and culture is constantly present in Kafka, who shows readers how their assumptions are based on an anthropocentric view: as readers we constantly perceive animal actions to be driven by instinct, maybe monothematic and only aimed at some basic need. In Kafka, nature and culture often mix in an organic fashion,[310] his animals and creatures, as observed by Goodbody, mostly come from previous traditions and cultures,[311] often keeping the Jewish imagery and behaviour.[312] Because they are inserted into a human context and have behaviours that we would not expect, they pervert what we, readers coming from an anthropocentric perspective, consider to be "human", but in Kafka's fiction is only another perspective.

One of the shortest stories written by Kafka, *Leopards in the Temple*, describes the incorporation into a ritual of leopards drinking water in a temple simply because they keep doing it. Although the whole story consists of only five sentences, it sums up the normalisation of the behaviour of the "other". The presence of the leopards in a temple should evoke a sense of fear and a struggle from the people to avoid this from happening again. Instead, none of this is even briefly mentioned. In a perverted course of action, the behaviour of the leopards is integrated into a constructed ritual: the natural, instinctive and therefore irrational behaviour of the "other"[313] is conventionally agreed to become part of the performance through a perverted action. The animals are still recognized as "other", but their action is seen as integral to what is needed by the "normal" humans to perform their ritual.

By integrating animals into rituals, Kafka is making them part of a culture made of words, language and acts,[314] which are all parts, as mentioned above, of the concept of "humanity". He does so even more clearly in *Josephine the Songstress*: the characters of the story are mice that enjoy art and keep going to the performance of their main singer even when she loses her voice. In the essay mentioned above, Deleuze and Guattari stress the importance of becoming an animal to create a harmonious partnership with them. Kafka resolves the process: animals have become humans while remaining animals. They have transcended the totemistic symbolism that ascribes them one feature, one expanded skill, and take part in human endeavours and behaviour and became part of the human tribe: the dog of *Investigations of a Dog* uses his perspective for scientific inquiry, the jackals talk to humans and use a human-like intelligence to plot a murder committed through deception and weapons. The creature Odradek of *The cares of a Family Man* suggests a further step towards the evolution that will enable the destruction of the human/animal dualism. Kafka uses several creatures possessing features that do not belong to one exclusive species, playing even more with the perversion of standards and categories, but Odradek occupies a unique role. As Žižek points out, the reason why Odradek seems to be broken is that he may have been a part of the family man.[315] Žižek sees this break as the reason why the family man is attached to it, but we need to remember that Odradek, by being potentially

[309] Romeo Castellucci, *Il Pellegrino della Materia*, in *Epopea della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio 1992-1999*, ed. Claudia Castellucci, Romeo Castellucci and Chiara Guidi, (Milano: Ubulibri, 2001), 268-286.

[310] G. Neumann, "Kafka als Ethnologe," in Bay and Hamann (ed.), *Odradeks Lachen*, 325-346.

[311] A. Goodbody, "Animal Studies: Kafka's Animal Stories".

[312] Karl-Erich Grötzinger, *Kafka and Kabbalah* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 95-120.

[313] Lynda Byrke and Luciana Parisi, *Animals, Becoming*, in *Animal Others,* ed. H. Peter Steeves, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 55-71.

[314] Michael Ott, "Ritualität und Theatralität," in *Szenographien. Theatralität als Kategorie der Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Gerhard Neumann, Caroline Pross and Gerald Wildgruber (Freiburg: Rombach, 2000), 309-342.

[315] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

immortal, has overcome the "standard" every living creature submits to: death. Odradek is not human, therefore, according to the anthropocentric dualism, he is an animal who can understand language, talk and laugh without needing human organs. At the same time, his superior agility makes him an animal, too. Odradek is then the quintessential perversion of humanity, because it transcends the standard of humanity contraposed to the "otherness" of animals. He will see the death of the family man, his children and grandchildren and other generations, until only Odradek(s) can remain. He will become the standard, what we now consider "human", broken from the family man without ever having been a part of him because it is the family man himself that partially defines Odradek and not vice versa.

Kafka's animal/human dualism is not too different from the male/female dualism that assumes and imposes behaviours on both sides of the spectrum. Because biology is taken as the decision maker of behaviour, it is considered perverse or "against nature" if members of one side become (and do not simply imitate) the other by performing their standards. The entertainment industry talks about drag performances when men perform female characters or vice versa, but, borrowing this term in the light of what has been examined so far, gender becoming through careful imitation is not the only kind of drag.

KAFKA'S ANIMALS

Kafka's focus on animals and frequent use of non-human animals stems from his vegetarianism based on ethical treatment of living beings. In his search of identity, in fact, he seems to be incapable of determining where "human" and "animal" separate. This section shows different critical approaches and perspectives to Kafka's fusion of humanity and animality and how this perspective was perverted for his time, but also how this generates the foundation for the stories that will be later discussed in the chapter.

Discussing Kafka's relationship with animals and food, Coetzee focuses on *A Report to an Academy*, which will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. On a more general note, however, Coetzee points out how the treatment of other living beings as humans elevated, at least from his perspective, Kafka above his family: "[Franz Kafka] refused to eat this, he refused to eat that, he would rather starve, he said. Soon everyone was feeling guilty about eating in front of him and he could sit back feeling virtuous".[316]

This saint-like behaviour towards other living creatures explains the normality of the presence of animals and non-human creatures in Kafka's poetics: just as male and female mix and become the same in a drag performance, non-human living beings are on the same level as humans. In the next pages I mention the most recent or influential examples that show how non-human creatures become a perversion of humanity. Animals' performances (sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit) are a metaphor of the primal behaviour of human beings, who, imprisoned by society, perform according to social standards while still retaining their innate behaviour. Kafka shows how the animal performance is accepted by a human audience because animals are not limited by society, but, at the same time, the human audience reacts to the animal performance with either jealousy or desire to normalize it.

The mimicry in *Report to an Academy* is also the topic of one of the essays of Norris' *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*. Here, Norris compares human and non-human behaviour showing how "imitation belongs to the realm of Nature rather than culture, to the inhuman as well as the human"[317] and shows the implications of such a mimesis for the works of Kafka. The author shows how Kafka "exposes the devious political ends of imitation, re-enactment and performance in several of his fictions",[318] linking a work like *A Report to an Academy* to animal mimicry and performance, useful in some evolutionary stages. In Kafka's work the process of

[316] John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1999), 68.
[317] Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, 53.
[318] Ibid., 54.

evolution is perverted, as well, as it changes an individual rather than a species, but it serves the purpose of showing how humans expect from animal performances that resemble their own and, consequently, how animals can imitate humans. In Kafka's stories, animals become capable of generating the symbolic thought that, according to Berger, was distinctive of humans.[319] In *Report to an Academy* the narration of the story starts with an apology to be speaking plainly and without using images, as the speaker prefers: being a human and not anymore an animal, he is capable of speaking in images. At the same time, the speaker needs to be acknowledged as an animal by the academic audience and he does so by showing his commonalities with them: his past as an ape, he says, is only five years away, but at the same time his ape nature is as far from him as that of his audience.

The commonalities between animals and humans are also underlined by Chris Danta, who shows how they are metaphors and analogies throughout Kafka's narrative. His main point is that the sacrificial lamb and the human scapegoat coincide and he takes Josef K. in *The Trial* as the main example.[320] In this instance the comparison is inverted, as the human is taking a typically animal role, instead of the opposite, but in another essay,[321] Danta shows how Kafka tends to give animals human features in order to explore the latter through the behaviour of the former. In this last work, Danta compares the bachelor insect to the fox wife which David Garnett's character transforms into in his novel *The Metamorphosis of Mrs. Tebrick* (1922). According to Janouch, when confronted with the idea, Kafka rejected the possibility of plagiarism, claiming that "It's a matter of the age. We both copied from that. Animals are closer to us than human beings. ... We find relations with animals easier than with men."[322] This sentence is not only indicative of the fact that Kafka was conscious of the comparison that can be made in his texts between animals and humans, but also implies Kafka's feeling that humans are alienated from each other.

In the same essay in which the animals of Orwell's *Animal Farm* are taken as representatives of humans, Thomas Wolman includes an analysis of *The Metamorphosis* as one of the most representative transformations in literature.[323] He also stresses the parallel between Gregor's human and animal behaviour, but I extend this parallel to the rest of Kafka's literature. This is consistent with Corngold's suggestion that Kafka's interest in studying humanity as a series of laws through both humans and animals arose during the last years of his career.[324] In this earlier stage, Kafka seems to be using creatures as a metaphor for the identity of a specific character, who is also almost certainly his own alter-ego. Like the vermin, in fact, Gregor also had an isolated life and his sister is the only family member he had some intimacy with. Our attention is also pointed to the human elements of the vermin. According to Berger, the existence of language allows humans to confirm each other's presence, while animals can only react in response to signals.[325] Gregor tries to talk and through this attempt at language the family acknowledges him as their child and brother. However, now that he has changed his physical shape, he is incapable of speaking intelligibly and performs like the creature he has become, his performance is perverted because it not that of a human, but only for the humans. The performance of Gregor's human nature blends with that of an animal: he is still capable of abstract thought, but is also similar to a child who is discovering his body, is innocent and emptied of his experiences, as

[319] John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 251-261.

[320] Chris Danta, "Like a dog...like a lamb," *New Literary History* 38 (4) (2007), 721-737.

[321] Chris Danta, "Animal Bachelors and Animal Brides: Fabulous Metamorphosis in Kafka and Garnett," in *Philosophy and Kafka*, ed. Brendan Moran and Carlo Salzani (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 129-158.

[322] Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, 134

[323] Thomas Wolman, "Human to Animal Transformations in Literature," in *Cultural Zoo,* ed. Salman Akhtar (Madison: International Universities Press, 2005), 92-124.

[324] Stanley Corngold, *Kafka's later Stories and Aphorisms*, in Preece, *A Cambridge companion to Kafka* 95-110.

[325] John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

nothing he could do as a human makes sense after the transformation. The relationship between humanity and animality slowly fades as the narration goes on, even if, contrary to what happens in *Josephine*, the artistic pursuit remains always alive in Gregor, as we see by his interest in his sister's performance that also represents the final contact with the family. Although he will never fully lose the consequences of the perverted event, Gregor is increasingly deprived of his human features, which confirms the reading that in Kafka's literature animals have human characteristics and can therefore be seen as metaphors for human behaviour. They can become steadily more separate from human nature (as happens with the vermin, who is identified with faeces by the charwoman), but the narrative shows a clear human-animal (or, more generally, non-human creature) parallel.

In theorizing a devolutionary path from human to insect, Mark Anderson emulates Wolman,[326] but takes the path of loss even further. Not only does Gregor start losing his humanity once he becomes an insect, but he becomes an insect *because* he is losing his humanity. According to Anderson, though, there is an additional link with humanity thanks to the vermin: "Kafka reverses the camera angle, forcing us to see not so much the insect as the world of higher primates from the insect's perspective".[327] The animal, then, is not only a representation of human behaviour, but also the means through which human behaviour can be studied, as Corngold observed.[328]

Frank Stevenson shows how this study can be done through the creature of *The Burrow*. Kafka's animals are often free (particularly when they cannot speak), but human influence attempts to subjugate them to social standards, normalize their performance to something understandable, thus limiting their freedom. The normalization is clear in stories like *Leopards in the Temple*, in which some leopards interrupt religious rituals until they become themselves part of them. However, animal behaviour can be perverted by the reciprocal gaze with humans: according to Stevenson, the mole-like creature in *The Burrow* is someone with an "all-too-human desire [...] not just to build (and obsessively continue building, rebuilding, 'fixing') his fine house but to stand back and, on another, more reflective level, enjoy the feeling of 'possessing' it".[329] But Stevenson also treats *The burrow* like a metaphor of Kafka's own health situation at the time of writing, underlining, together with Deleuze, the importance of sound in the story. The mole hears sounds coming from other parts of the burrow, but never sees the other inhabitants. Stevenson compares the sounds to the sound of Kafka's lungs and the "other creatures" to his illness, whose presence is certain, but cannot be seen or dealt with. This becomes a way to explore the situation objectively and scientifically, like the protagonist of *Investigations of a Dog* does in his search for the origin of food: "while the mole-narrator realizes his body is vulnerable to attack, indeed is already being ravaged by disease, Kafka does not dwell here (as would Poe) on the macabre details of disease and dying. Instead, he foregrounds the abstract 'scientific' problem of listening to and interpreting the noises in order to understand".[330] Even with this reading, the stereotypical role of animals as creatures of pure instinct is perverted: both the mole and the dog are scientific, human-like, and this adds a layer of doubt and fear to their actions. The mole gives up to fear and performs acts and reactions in the same fashion as a human being trying anything to feel secure. However, it is impossible to get rid of that fear, because the perverted animal is doomed to behave like a human whose fears are an emanation of the self. Stevenson's medical interpretation is that the mole is an embodiment of Kafka's human desire to feel better, secure, and to understand what is going on in his body. The metaphor can be extended, in my opinion, seeing it as Kafka's realization that once the organism has been perverted, there is no point even

[326] Anderson, "Down the Evolutionary Ladder?," in *Kafka's Clothes.*

[327] Ibid., 130.

[328] Corngold, *Kafka's later Stories and Aphorisms.*

[329] Frank W. Stevenson, "Becoming Mole(cular), Becoming Noise: Serres and Deleuze in Kafka's 'Burrow'," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 30, no.1 (2004): 3-36.

[330] Ibid., 7.

to wish to fight back. To understand and to give a shape to those sounds becomes the only option, even when they converge into becoming one big, unidentifiable creature.

In conclusion, Kafka's animals cannot be separated strongly from humans until we study the specific behaviour of every animal character, that can be influenced in different measures by animality and humanity. Animality is depicted as a state of freedom, untouched by the social standards characterizing humanity. In their reciprocal imitation, animals and humans affect each other, but to shift into the opposite realm is a perversion and as such is unacceptable in a society dominated by standards. Nonetheless, humans are influenced by animals and attempt to normalize them through performances and performative processes that will be described in the next section.

ANIMALS AND HUMANS: PERFORMING SPECTATORS

Cinema has always been interested in animals and the representation of animal instincts like survival and evolution, the foundation of Darwin's theory, constantly associating the performances of animals and humans, to the point of showing them in erotic partnership in "films [that] cannot be dismissed simply as belonging to the genres of horror, pornography and exploitation, designed primarily to shock and titillate".[331] It is not only animals that perform for humans, but the opposite is true, too: through performance and influence, animals are an epistemological mirror of our humanity. We learn something more about ourselves every time we try to observe the world through the eyes of an animal, even if, by doing so, we are still applying an anthropocentric perspective. After a shower, Derrida realized his nakedness because his cat was observing him. This brought him to question himself about shame, a pointless feeling in the eyes of an animal, because "with the exception of man, no animal has ever thought to dress itself".[332] This event brings him to wonder about his real nature as a human and in relation to animals as an absolute other with a perspective of their own.

The performance of animals on a stage (or in a film) is considered differently to that of humans: "There is an uneasy sense that the animal on stage, unless very firmly tethered to a human being who looks like he or she owns it, is there against its will, or if not its will, its best interest".[333] Ridout reminds us that even in a performance we look at animals and humans differently. We do not associate animals with the artifice of a performance, in which human act based on rituals, languages and conventions (a script, for example), but animals' behaviour could be exploited, because they did not choose, according to what we consider consent, to be performing. However, when we choose to go to a circus or a zoo or an illegal fight between animals, what we are willing to see is their behaviour in unnatural situations. Linda Kalof gives several examples of animal representations in which they are performing human activities, including playing instruments.[334] We can also think of every instance in circus and other performing arts in which animals are portrayed in human clothes, doing human activities and working human jobs. The entertainment we derive from this representation goes together with the learning potential: in everyday language, animals are used to describe features or behaviours that are so dominant in someone that we do not consider them human. Our observation shifts from the "natural" that we expect in animality to a middle ground with the "cultural" we expect in humanity. Our perspective only confirms what Kafka shows in his perversion of humanity: as humans, we decide to be different from our animals and we arbitrarily create categories that distinguish us from animals (and eventually from each other). This distinction "is achieved

[331] Barbara Creed, "A Darwinian Love Story: 'Max Mon Amour' and the Zoocentric Perspective in Film," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 20, no.1 (2006): 46.

[332] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that therefore I am*, in *Animal Philosophy,* ed. Calarco and Atterton,

[333] Ridout, *Stage Fright*, 97.

[334] Linda Kalof, *Looking at Animals in Human History* (London: Reaktion, 2007).

through the violent subjugation of non-human animals, either through hunting on the one hand, or domestication and sacrifice on the other".[335]

Finally, real performing animals allow us to acknowledge something about ourselves, just as Derrida's cat allows his owner to ponder his humanity as a creature capable of feeling shame. Rosenthal believes there are only two possible reasons to use animals in performance: to represent humanity's feeling of superiority or to represent human defects.[336] Although it may seem simplistic, this perspective justifies many reactions to the animal presence on stage:

> The strangeness of the animal on stage [...comes from] the fact that there is suddenly nothing strange about it being there, the fact that it has as much business being there, being exploited there, as any human performer. In the shudder, the unease, the disquiet and the caution with which we greet the appearance of the animal on the stage, we are responding to this looking back, and in that looking back the recognition of some kind of complicity in domination and submission.[337]

In his poem *The Panther*, it is the gaze of the panther that causes Rilke to understand the suffocating feeling of imprisonment the animal is going through. That poem, in its slow pace, puts the poet and the reader in the same emotional state as the animal, suggesting that we would all be the same in similar circumstances and therefore the difference between human readers/circus-goers and the caged animal is minimal. The sense of shame that we feel from the complicity of enjoying an animal performance may come from the same place where our shock at the mistreatment of animals on stage comes: the awareness that animals had no say in our feeling of superiority over them. If both humans and animals have a point of view leading to similar results, there must be fewer differences than we like to think.

Returning to Kafka's animal characters, the human-animal relationship through the gaze is probably best exemplified through irony in the disappearance of human beings in the *Investigations of a* Dog. In this story, the scientific analysis of the dog does not even take into consideration the existence of creatures other than dogs. The fact that the narrator sees the effects of the presence of humans, but not the humans themselves, is a reminder of the perverted perspective that results from observations biased by a social standard. However, in this instance I focus on the gaze of explicit performances like those of *A Report to an Academy* and *Up in the Gallery*. I discuss the first more extensively in the last section of this chapter, but in the story the gaze plays a vital role to, literally, transform an animal into a human through imitation and assimilation of human activities and is mirrored during the journey from Africa to Germany. A similar journey was part of the shows put on by Hagenbeck, who in the story commissions the capture of Red Peter: in what Kafka ends up describing as a perversion of roles, Hagenbeck often displayed animals dressed and trained to behave like humans.[338]

Up in the Gallery is divided into two parts:[339] in the first we participate in the dream of a circus spectator watching a show amidst "an insatiable public" and in the second we see what is actually happening in the performance. What is immediately obvious is that the eternal performance is happening for the audience: both animal and people adapt their behaviour to a perverted extreme to satisfy an insatiable audience. The dream performance swaps the human and the animal performers' qualities: the lady rider is tubercular, but needs to keep up with the horse, who is implicitly strong and powerful, as he can stand months and months of

[335] Ridout, *Stage Fright*, 114.
[336] Rachel Rosenthal, "Animals Love Theatre," *The Drama Review* 51, no.1 (2007): 5-7.
[337] Ridout, *Stage Fright*, 127.
[338] Alexander Honold, "Berichte von der Menschenschau," in *Odradeks Lachen*, 305-324.
[339] Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, 436-437. The following quotes are all from page 436, unless specified.

uninterrupted running under the whip and the constant noise of the fans and the orchestra. In reality, the woman is "lovely [...] floats between the curtains", moves gracefully, is admired by every other performer and paternally loved by the director, who treats her like "her most precious granddaughter", while the only thing we know about the horse is that he is dapple-grey. The spectator's reactions to the two images are diametrically opposite: in the dream he is proactive, runs to the arena and tries to stop the never-ending performance. In reality, his only reaction is to put "his face on the rail before him and, sinking into the closing march as into a heavy dream, [weep] without knowing it".[340]

Heller saw this story as Kafka's experimentation with positive feelings,[341] failed because both scenarios imply negative consequences and the spectator's suffering. Boa sees the story as an expression of the viewer's unstable masculinity[342] and, together with Osterwalder,[343] identifies an oedipal situation between the director who controls the woman and her horse (an animal that in *A Country Doctor* already symbolized sexual power) and the viewer. I would like to take a different approach and, without denying these possible interpretations, limit my analysis to the perspective of the viewer, as Ritter[344] and Spahr[345] do. Ritter maintains the spectator has no connection with the action in the ring, but feels a connection with the female artist and her exploitation. In my opinion, this connection exists through the horse, which causes the spectator's reactions.

The three human characters of the story are the director, the performer and the spectator. The director is the only character that never changes: both in the dream and in reality, he is strong and powerful, "ruthless" in the dream and caring but capable to "exhort the grooms who hold the loops to be most closely attemptive", uses his whip to impart orders and maintains discipline and can easily be seen as the recurring father figure of Kafka's story (as Boa does). The spectator perverts reality in his dream, transforming the performer from an agile and healthy figure to a frail, tuberculotic woman who emulates the spreading of her sickness by blowing kisses and swaying her hips in a sexual fashion. The audience goes from an insatiable part of the noise to an element that is dominated by the ringmaster and the performer. Only the spectator is left, but he does not represent the audience: so far we could describe him as the perspective who could describe or pervert reality, it is not possible to do so when observing the horse and the spectator himself. The two influence each other: when the horse is strong, so is the spectator, who finds the courage to try to stop a show that was doomed to last forever, while when the horse is just a random element of the show and his only feature is to be of a common and generic colour, the same is valid for the spectator.

When we consider this story in the light of the viewer/horse relationship, we find further confirmation that Kafka's stories describe the perversion of the performance of reality through an external, subjective influence. An influence that ends up affecting every element of that reality, from the innocent horse to the actively engaged performer.

In this section I have discussed the effects of the reciprocal gaze that animals and humans share and how this can lead to better comprehension of reality and even identification. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, though, the difference between animals and humans is much less defined than it may seem and Kafka's understanding of the subtlety will lead to the discussion of the perversion of what may be seen as defining humanity.

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[340] Ibid., 437.

[341] Peter Heller, "On Not Understanding Kafka," *The German Quarterly* 47, no.3 (1974): 373-393.

[342] Elizabeth Boa, "'Auf der Galerie': A Resistent Reading," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 65 (1991): 486-501.

[343] Hans Osterwalder, "Dreamscapes: Harold Pinter's 'The Room' and Kafka's 'Auf der Galerie'," *Zeitschrift für Anglistick und Amerikanistik* 52, no.1 (2004): 57-60.

[344] Naomi Ritter, "Up in the Gallery: Kafka and Prevert," *MLN* 96, no.3 (1981): 632-637.

[345] Blake Lee Spahr, "Kafka's 'Auf der Galerie': A Stylistic Analysis," *The German Quarterly* 23 (1960): 211-215.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF DRAG

With the term "drag", we usually refer to the practice, common in different kinds of performances, of dressing and acting in ways that are stereotypically associated with the sex the performer does not biologically belong to. In its broadest sense, drag can be seen as the act of imitating a group without belonging to it. My argument here is that the representation of the other becomes a way to dis-identify with categories that have been imposed by external influences and to highlight the existence of a liminal position by occupying it. Some of Kafka's animals, both human and non-human, represent the group they do not biologically belong to and we can therefore talk about "racial drag", borrowing the terminology from Katrin Sieg's "ethnic drag". Like gender drag, racial drag is not a symbolic representation of the other group, but a way to represent and identify both groups into one form.

Katrin Sieg talks about ethnic drag in different forms: from the Jewish impersonation in *Nathan der Weise* to the reconstruction of races in the imitation of Native Americans performed by Germans as a metaphor for Jewish persecution under the Third Reich.[346] Sieg uses the idea of ethnic drag to indicate the representation of the features of one ethnic group by members of another. Borrowing her terminology, I refer to racial drag to indicate human behaviour represented by non-human animals, in this case. Sieg analyses how ethnic drag performances challenge identity through their cathartic power. She observes a change in power in historical moments to convey the other ethnicity's perspective and the complexity of opposing movements. Kafka's racial drag does the same on a human/non-human level. In the introduction to his book, Roger Baker examines the social reception of drag in the second half of the 20th century, reminding how it was commonly associated with homosexuality and shame. Men in drag often looked "parodic, self-mocking - absolutely nothing to do with real women".[347] The parody and use of stereotypes does not imply a perversion of masculinity or femininity, but a perversion of gender, because the concept of gender is what is addressed. In the same way, a racial drag is not a perversion of the specific race, but a representation of the division between humanity/animality altogether.

Kafka's use of the performance of animals and creatures in the stories has a similar component, in which, I argue, it is possible to recognize another identity, the search for which is similar to the search for an individual or a gender identity. The perversion in this case lies in the imitation of some aspects of humanity and its features, as well as in the more superficial situation of a human/animal transformation (*A Report to an Academy* and *The Metamorphosis*), sentient animals behaving like humans (*Investigations of a Dog, Josephine the Songstress*, *The Burrow,* among other) or fantastic creatures (*A Crossbreed* and *The Cares of a Family Man*). None of Kafka's stories show a gender drag: they show how humans and animals can mirror each other to show how every standard can be applied to different categories, thus perverting the standard. This discourse is parallel to the gender issue discussed in the previous chapter. For example, male/female identity standards are arbitrarily imposed and can be perverted: as Sieg reminds us, "Judith Butler contended that drag could undo the 'expressive logic' of identity and show up the 'performativity' of gender and sexuality".[348] This is one of the reasons why drag performances are still used as a shocking element in performance. It raises ethical questions about identity, but above all questions about what lies behind concepts that are taken for granted. The reason for this confusion has the same origin of Calarco's response to Levinas' issue raised in *The Paradox of Morality*. Levinas describes an experience he had while in an internment camp with a dog who could recognize the humanity of the prisoners even where, according to Levinas, there was no humanity left, but at the same time he admits that it is hard to "discover the face of an animal.

[346] K. Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*.

[347] Roger Baker, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts* (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 6.

[348] Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 16.

[He doesn't] know if a snake has a face".[349] To this, Calarco observes that the ethical experience cannot always coexist with phenomenology and that it cannot be captured by thought.[350]

The performativity of a drag act is determined by its attempt to reach some goal, which could be the representation of a female character in an era in which female actors are not welcome on stage, the mocking of a group or person, or even the metaphor of something else represented without referencing it explicitly. This is what Kafka does in *A Report to an Academy*. The performative value of the narration is clear from the title: being a report, it already implies observations, results and conclusions affecting the audience. More specifically, it shows how the gaze of both animal and human individuals allows for the creation and perversion of social standards. This explicit performance not only constantly fades the border between human and non-human animals and keeps open the question about the real presence of a separation, but also makes it more evident how gender and animal discourse are closely related to each other in Kafka's narrative.

Every drag performance is performative, as it raises questions about the ontological existence of a separation of categories and how the audience can determine which features belong to which category. Claudia Koonz's *Mothers in the Fatherland* exemplifies how this behaviour happens in other social fields. Koonz quotes an article written in 1933 by Bertha Pappenheim for the *Blätter des Jüdischen Frauenbundes*, a magazine targeted to Jewish women, which exemplifies the deliberate use of a kind of ethnic drag by Jewish Germans. Peppenheim advises her readers "to maintain a 'non-Jewish' image. Simultaneously, contributors wrote of Jewish pride-inspiring them to preserve in private the stubborn courage that would have provoked antisemitism in public".[351] The magazine's readers may have suffered ill consequences if they had publicly displayed a Jewish image; a kind of ethnic drag enables them to deal with an anti-Semitic sentiment in Germany. The Jewish performance of ethnic drag in everyday life was familiar to Kafka, who felt close to the idea that "You are what your ancestors were. This is the Jewish masochist's internalization of the stereotypical representation of the Jew in the *fin-de-siecle* culture",[352] but at the same time believed that it was possible to leave the image of the "other" and, through imitation and exercise, both of which are components of performance, reflect a different image. This is also the path followed by his human and non-human animals. Gregor Samsa desires more freedom, an animal feature, and therefore becomes an insect; one of the teachers mentioned in *Report to an Academy* becomes a monkey after having taught Red Peter how to become a human. Both of them suffer the consequences of perverting standards, by being killed and hospitalized respectively, which shows the performative aspect of racial drag within social standards. On the opposite side, and I discuss more in detail at the end of the chapter, we find Red Peter, whose "otherness" (ape in a world of humans, but it could be expanded to any perversion among standards) causes him to be treated differently depending on the perception the audience has of him. As a monkey he is tortured, as an academic he is respected and in the mid-stage he is treated as a circus performer: while he is always the same, his racial drag has a performative effect over the perception of himself.

Although drag performances are still used sometimes to impress the audience in shows like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) or in films like *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott, 1994), it is also a way to represent the inequality of treatment between different categories. Two specular examples are *Tootsie* (Sydney Pollack, 1982), in which Dustin Hoffman plays the role of an actor forced to dress like a woman to work, and *Yentl* (Barbra Streisand, 1983), in which Barbra Streisand plays the role of a Jewish woman

[349] Atterton and Calarco, *Animal Philosophy*, 49.

[350] Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[351] Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 358.

[352] Gilman, *The Jewish Patient*, 43.

who can only get an education by dressing as a boy. To paraphrase Levinas' realization, these examples of drag raise the ethical issue of what the audience considers fundamental to claim that someone belongs to a certain gender (or, in Kafka's specular use of the categories, race) and why are those specific features paramount.

More interesting from a performative point of view are non-occasional drag performers and their conception of sexuality. In some circumstances, performers choose this form of expression, because it is strictly connected to what I maintain is one of Kafka's main motivations for the use of perversion: identity.

> Our interactions with others are affected by the ability to interpret and impart information about ourselves, particularly the communication of gender and sexuality. Drag performers, those who perform extreme expressions of gender for an audience, occupy a grey area in gender, in that they do not fit into the neat gender dichotomy of male and female. [...] Drag performers may be capable of seeing gender as less essential and more fluid.[353]

As argued in the third chapter and confirmed, among others, by West and Zimmermann,[354] gender is constructed on the basis of traditions and environment and is affected by "the presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production".[355] This means that drag performers construct their gender based on stereotypes, but they live in a situation in which masculinity and femininity have less fixed boundaries and conceive gender more fluidly. The identification with one gender or another becomes often impossible, therefore throwing into question the construction of gender and sexuality. A similar impossibility of identification is raised every time that Kafka describes a parallel between human and non-human animals. In *Jackals and Arabs*, a group of talking jackals asks a traveller to kill the Arabs accompanying him. These jackals are described as animals, but their words, behaviour and placement in the title (the name of a race next to the name of an ethnic identity) suggest that if they were another human ethnic group the story would be almost identical. The most obvious parallel is with Jews, but they could also be other ethnic groups, a symbol for nature demanding vengeance against human abuse represented by the Arabs and several other interpretations. The specific symbolism loses value and the reading key to racial drag in Kafka's narrative is the perversion of standards used to describe categories. Both the human and the non-human animals of the story provide the audience with stereotypes about themselves, but at the same time, like drag performers, show how the concept of their symbolisms can be represented through other means. The debate about identity leaves an open question: do performers replicating categories receive the power of the copied category (as it happens in *Tootsie* and *Yentl*, but also to the jackals that are scared away as animals, instead of killed like human enemies), or is drag performance an expression of the fluidity of categories? Or, to bring the metaphor back to Kafka's use of animals, does it mean that humanity and animality influence each other by being observers and imitators of both categories? The clearest example suggesting the lack of belonging to either category while being both may be the half kitten-half lamb with human behaviour described in *A Crossbreed*. The main message offered by the story is to show how those who do not belong to any binary category still have features common to both, but they fuse into new and unique behaviours. In the previous chapter I have discussed the presence of a third gender in Kafka's stories with features of both standard genders plus some of its own. Similarly, when Kafka describes creatures that do not

[353] Justine Egner, Patricia Maloney, "It has no Color, it has no Gender, It's Gender Bending": Gender and Sexual Fluidity and Subversiveness in Drag Performance," *Journal of Homosexuality* 63, no.7 (2016): 877.

[354] Candace West, Don H. Zimmermann, "Doing Gender," in *Gender and Society* 1, no.2 (1987): 125-151.

[355] Ibid., 126.

belong to animal or human realms, he is bringing the reader into the realm of racial drag, where both races can be the other, retaining some of their original features and coming up with new ones. Odradek, for example, is not human, but talks and thinks like one and his movements are unique to him. In the short story *The Vulture*, a man accepts his fate to be devoured by a vulture because he loses his battle with the animal and, like prey, awaits his destiny. His human actions can be seen in the dialogue with a passer-by, who offers to shoot at the animal as soon as he makes it back from home, where the gun is. The vulture, in a display of humanity, is able to understand the conversation, but instead of escaping or doing something dictated by instincts, it sacrifices itself and kills the victim at the same time by thrusting its beak in his mouth and drowning in the human's blood. These and other examples, like the already discussed *Josephine the Singer* and *Investigations of a Dog* show how, in Kafka's perversion of animal and human performance, the two influence each other to the point of becoming a third group, as happens in gender performances inside and outside Kafka's stories.

This section focused on the description of drag as a performative technique to show the fundamental difficulty to divide categories based on superficial features. Both gender and racial drag show how created categories can affect individuals and social behaviour through superficial behaviour and features that, as observed in the previous chapter, essentially come from conventions and imitations. In the next section, I focus on the story *A Report to an Academy* seen from the performative angle of two recent theatre adaptations. Being a monologue of a monkey turned into a human, the story offers itself to adaptations, while at the same time openly showing a racial drag symbolizing, as I argue, the performance of gender.

THE KAFKIAN MONKEY

A Report to an Academy is, together with *The Metamorphosis*, the clearest example of the thin line that Kafka saw in the human/animal division. Even more than *The Metamorphosis*, this story portrays performance, both explicit and implicit, as a fundamental element to describe and cross that line, as well as every other equally thin line, like that of gender. Because of the importance of performance in this story, in this section I compare two theatrical adaptations performed in recent years and discuss how they have performed the parallel between animal and gender themes that can be drawn from the story. In fact, in my view the path to achieve the transformation (or animal drag, the story never conclusively tells which one of the two it is) expressed in the narration is comparable to the process transformation from an un-gendered body to a gendered, and specifically male, one.

Countless adaptations of *The Metamorphosis* have been performed, both for theatre and film, and I have already discussed a few in the context of the performance and perversion of gender, but *A Report to an Academy*, although in a sense specular, has not been given an equal amount of attention. The reason I consider this story specular to *The Metamorphosis* is because in the *Report*, the non-human animal turns into a human, but it is possible to see how some aspects of the ape's life have been retained after the mutation. In the same way, in the *Metamorphosis* some of the features defining humanity have been kept by Gregor after turning into a bug. Because these characters have both transformed into something else, but show features of their previous forms, they beg the question of the boundary between mimicry and reality.

When it comes to the presence of drag, *A Report to an Academy* manages to occupy a liminal area: although Red Peter is addressing an Academy, we are sure neither what species he belongs to, nor if the Academy exists and who its members might be. If the audience is there, we can talk about an explicit performance and the reader becomes also a spectator and brings her/his own biases, perspectives and expectations into the performative space. As I have already pointed out, the main reason Kafka's animal stories are not to be considered as fables is that the anthropocentric vision influences the reader too much. The story is told in the first person, differentiating it from the parables, and there is no interaction with the audience. For all the

reader knows, Red Peter could be addressing other apes, he could be an ape dreaming, an ape turned human rehearsing his speech or a human actor. Even the definition of "Academy" is not specific: it is usually intended as a congregation of scholars, but it can also be used as a generic term to mean the world of scholars in an abstract sense and therefore not something someone can really talk to. Kafka makes a similar use of the term "Law" in the parable *Before the Law*.

The performative aspect of this story is multiple: the ape is (presumably) giving a lecture, a performance in itself, while behaving and maybe looking closer to the human he has turned into in order to stop giving performances in a circus as an ape. Throughout the story we never know if Red Peter now looks like a human, if his voice is human, where he is or how he moves and behaves. The two performances – for the circus and the academy - are just two different aspects of the same behaviour: in both scenarios, Red Peter is entertaining the audience with his peculiarity, but, as a human, he is considered more refined because he matches scientific rigor and standards. The audience of the Academy is silent and respectful, as opposed to the audience of sailors, who are chaotic, rude and agitated at every movement of the monkey. Red Peter also describes the audience of circus shows he used to be part of. They admire the show, but Red Peter stresses the fact that they do not understand that the show is not really worth of admiration, being only the performance of controlled movement and not of real freedom. Only monkeys, in his view, would understand that show as pathetic and "they would laugh so hard that no theatre would be big enough to stand up that laughter" .[356] The animal audience shows a different kind of innocent audience, because it is free and cannot be contained in constructed spaces and behaviours. In fact, human audiences evolve at the same pace as Red Peter: from crass to educated and respectful, in line with the change of his performance from that of a captured animal to that of a human. Human audiences have standards of human behaviour and therefore treat Red Peter less as an "other" the more he matches those standards.

The behaviour of the audience based on preconceived standards of humanity and respectability mirrors Kafka's opinion of his father, who formally respected Judaism, but did not actually know much about it, while criticising Kafka's friendship with Yiddish actors who he saw as innocent and childlike. Hermann Kafka is ignorant about both performances, but judges them in two contrasting ways based on preconceived standards and their "humanity": religion demands respect by claiming to be speaking for entities above humanity, while the popular performances of humans-turned-animals (Kafka points out in the *Letter to His Father* that his actor friend was compared to a vermin and a dog) are despised. Kafka shows how audiences' behaviour is influenced by the performance they are watching. At the same time, they influence it, making every type of performance more or less respectable based on social standards and therefore educating future generations to that respect, or lack thereof.

Because of its performative character, every adaptation adds a further layer of performance by having a human playing a monkey who plays a human. The two adaptations I would like to discuss here are *Kafka's Monkey*, an adaptation that toured several countries between 2009 and 2012, directed by Walter Meierjohann and interpreted by Kathryn Hunter, and *The Kafkian Monkey*, performed in 2016 and 2017 in Melbourne and Adelaide, interpreted by me under the stage name Nores Cerfeda and directed together with Cristina Lark. Both performances use Kafka's text as a script with only minor editing. Colin Teevan, who wrote *Kafka's Monkey* added one fragment written by Kafka, but not used in the final version. *The Kafkian Monkey* only uses the final version of the text and adds contemporary references to smartphones in the direction for comedic effect.

Even if they use the same textual reference, the two adaptations have several differences that will be discussed below. The major difference is that *The Kafkian Monkey* contains more

[356] The text has been translated by myself and slightly modified for the show *The Kafkian Monkey*. The original, from which every quote of the text is taken and indicated as BA, is Franz Kafka, "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie," in *Das Urteil und andere Erzählungen*, ed. Peter Höfle, 50-60. Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 2003, 54.

references to the animality/gender metaphor and does not make clear at any stage if the animal-to-human transition is to be taken literally. By contrast, *Kafka's Monkey* stresses the hybrid looks and behaviour of the main character, suggesting that his transformation results in something that is neither completely human nor animal. This is a first confirmation of the idea that Kafka's drag performances create something that overcomes social standards and performing arts are an effective tool to represent these results.

> Honourable members of the Academy, you have done me the great honour to invite me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape. Unfortunately, I cannot comply with your request to the extent you desire, because almost five years have passed since I was an ape. It may not sound like a long time when counted by the calendar, but it's an infinitely long time to gallop through at full speed, as I have done. (BA, 50)

With these words, Red Peter is introduced to us. An ape turned into a human who can barely remember anything about his past prior to his training as a human. Superficially, we are looking at a story mirroring *The Metamorphosis*, neither of which Kafka considered animal parables, but rather animal stories.[357] The first questions the incipit suggests are: "What is human?"[358] and therefore "What makes the monkey a 'human' and what was he before?". I have already suggested how some critics saw Red Peter's journey as the passage from Jewishness to Christianity,[359] like a symbol for the Africans whose land was being colonized by Europe and who were forced to adapt to a different life and habits,[360] a search for spirituality[361] and in several other ways. These are all possible interpretations, but not completely satisfactory, because they ignore some parts of the story and do not really account for Red Peter's violent and abusive behaviour after the transformation Red. Furthermore, they belong to the anthropocentric vision mentioned earlier and, as Harel points out, "the fact that there are so many different allegorical readings indicates that the story is not an allegory *par excellence*" (italics in the original).[362] I argue that Red Peter begins as an un-gendered body and becomes gendered because of the social education represented by the training he is forced to receive. However, this is not a symbolic representation of the human condition: Red Peter is the "other" victimized by human society and the living example of the possibility of training anyone for any role, including that of a man. I am here using the word "man" to indicate both a human, as per the literal reading of the story, and a creature whose gender is male. I am also using gendered pronouns to remain consistent with Kafka's use, but, particularly in the first part of the story, un-gendered pronouns would be more appropriate.

Most adaptations of Kafka's works represent the perversions contained in the plot and the images that Kafka uses so much in his worlds, but most adaptations are either a literal transposition of a story or a statement made by the director using Kafka's plots. *Kafka's Monkey* was already pathbreaking by having a female performer whose "physicality on stage is a challenge to what we take to be a human being anyway. She breaks all the conventional rules of appearance

[357] Ronald Hayman, *A Biography of Kafka* (New Haven: Phoenix Press, 2001), 219.
[358] Honold, *Berichte von der Menschenschau*.
[359] E. Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class and Race*.
[360] Richard A. Barney, "Between Swift and Kafka: Animals and the Politics of Coetzee's Elusive Fiction," *World Literature Today* 78, no.1 (2004): 17-23.
[361] Hebert Tauber, *Franz Kafka: An Interpretation of his Works* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1948).
[362] N. Harel, "De-allegorizing Kafka's Ape: Two Animalistic contexts," in *Kafka's Creatures*, 46.

and sexuality".[363] By doing so, Hunter was literally performing in sexual and racial drag, putting them on the same plane. The sexual element, therefore, assumed an importance that I also accorded it in my adaptation, *The Kafkian Monkey*. However, in order to confirm that this kind of parallel can be drawn, something in the story is needed that is neither fully human, nor fully ape. The main characters in the story told by Red Peter are he and the sailors and they are, at the time of the events, ape and humans, respectively. However, at the end of the play, Kafka adds one character. Red Peter speaks about *Affen* and *Affentum* (ape and ape nature) when referring to himself, but about a *halbdressierte Schimpansin* (half-trained female chimp) when talking about his partner. Taxonomically speaking, apes are a family which human beings belong to, like chimps, our evolutionary cousins, but we are different species and Kafka names the two characters in different ways, so what differentiates them? The *Schimpansin* is the only character in the whole monologue that is specifically identified as a female thanks to that suffix *–in*. In the same word, Kafka differentiates her because of her sex and her race, which suggests that the two are linked and different from the other characters. If race and sex are linked, this means that the tale of a racial transformation equates to the tale of a sexual transformation. Kafka does not mention a change in the biological sex of Red Peter, though. However, in Kafka's time the conversation about gender was only starting and focusing on the relationship between sex and sexuality within the social context, rather than on the mutual implications of sex and social expectations. Magnus Hirschfeld, a contemporary of Kafka and one of the first advocates for homosexual and transgender rights, started the *Yearbook of Intermediate Sexual Types* and developed a system to categorise more than 60 types of "sexual intermediaries", as his theory calls them, which represent the initial stage of the discourse about the social influence in gender. There is no record of Kafka reading Hirschfield, but *A Report to an Academy* complements the conversation: if Hirschfield was starting to show and defend the social placement of non-standard identities, behaviours and sexualities, Kafka was showing the social impact on shaping standards and behaviours in every identity. As de Beauvoir has since established: "One is not born a woman. One becomes a woman";[364] Red Peter was not born a man, but he becomes a man. It is easy to assume that Red Peter is male because of his name, but that name is given him by his captors, the "normalizers", and is Peter because another circus ape was named Peter. His name is masculine because this is the role he is given, but we don't know the gender or sex of either ape. Even Kathryn Hunter represents Red Peter as deformed and dressed as chimps would have been in circuses to look like humans for the entertainment of the audience. The tailcoat, tie and cane identify mimicry,[365] not belonging: Hunter shows what Red Peter has been taught to do, his belonging to the attributed standards, but she does not show any feature identifying Red Peter as male or female. Making this costume choice, Hunter seems to suggest that Red Peter does not realize that he is still a circus monkey for the audience, with the sole difference that now he is a circus monkey who can talk. This behaviour still mirrors some of the phases of gender discovery in children, during which a child imitates his/her parents by wearing their clothes and finding out, through social reactions, which ones are acceptable. In the text there is no indication about Red Peter's attire during the conference. Kafka only refers to the trousers he lowers to show everyone the wound on his side (an animalistic desire to go back to a freer, ungendered situation, when he was wounded). *Kafka's Monkey* suggests already in the use of the costume there is no need for a biologically male actor to portray Peter. In *The Kafkian Monkey* we wanted to show how gender affects the narrative by imposing a role on Peter as a performer, regardless of sex.

[363] Michael Coveney, "Kafka's Monkey, Young Vic, London," *The Independent*, March 24, 2009, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/kafkas-monkey-young-vic-london-1653245.html.

[364] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 267.

[365] Joshua Williams, "Going Ape: Simian feminism and transspecies drag," *Performance Research* 21, no.5 (2016): 68-77.

Kafka's most influential example of masculinity was his father, who, as more extensively discussed in Chapter two, was perceived by him as the archetypal man of the nineteenth century: big and sturdy, reserved, constantly needing to prove his masculinity, with a preference for physicality over intellect to the point of being violent and abusive, at least psychologically. It is hard to say if he really was so, but this is not crucial, because Kafka's perception of him is what modelled his idea of a male.

Red Peter is educated by two *Rundel*, packs: the first is that of the monkeys. They are free, as obsessively repeated throughout the story, and he is captured when monkeys are in their freest moment: while drinking at the river. Although Kafka was probably unaware of this and simply wanted to represent a moment in which Red Peter's guard was down, it is often when there is plenty of water around that some simians mate. They stay together in order to be ready to fight, should a predator attack, and some of them, depending on their status, mate indiscriminately with other females and males.[366] They are sexually free and there is no gender standard to comply with, because there is no gender concept.

Both adaptations take the audience to Africa through narration and show the capture scene. However, Hunter offers a banana as a visual aid and performs from the perspective of the hunters, by shooting at the audience, while we decided to show Red Peter's perspective, as his loss of consciousness seemed more representative of the end of a naïve and free life. In this instance, the audience of the show does not need to identify with the academy, Red Peter's audience. To do this, during some performances of *The Kafkian Monkey* some members of the audience were invited on stage and asked to move like the performer and drink with him at the "river" before being sent back to their seats after the shots that wound Red Peter are fired. The reason to involve the audience with actions and props is to make them relate with the ungendered monkeys, make them experience the freedom through playfulness and suddenly pervert their situation with the shots, after which they become again members of the academy. Even if we consider the fictional reality of Red Peter's conference, in this instance Red Peter is asking the members of the academy to be free, relinquish their own performance as serious scholars and enjoy the freedom from roles.

As a free, genderless ape, Red Peter is captured by hunters, men, and brought onto a ship populated by the second pack that will influence his life: sailors, another profession considered specifically masculine, and there is no reference to women on board the ship. Inside the cage, Red Peter is still dominated by instincts and exhibits "stereotypical behaviour":[367] hurts himself with the cage, alternates between sadness and apathy and shows aggressiveness to whoever comes near, even if he is powerless. It is now up to him to find a way out, which is not the same thing as freedom, as he explains.

> I fear that perhaps you do not quite understand what I mean by "way out." I use the expression in its fullest and most popular sense—I deliberately do not use the word "freedom." I do not mean the spacious feeling of freedom on all sides. As an ape, perhaps, I knew that, and I have met men who yearn for it. But for my part I desired such freedom neither then nor now. In passing: may I say that all too often men are betrayed by the word freedom. And as freedom is counted among the most sublime feelings, so the corresponding disillusionment can be also sublime. (BA, 54)

[366] Lance Workman, Will Reader, *Evolutionary Psychology: an introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014).

[367] Stephen St. C. Bostock, *Zoos and Animal Rights: The Ethics of Keeping Animals* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 88.

The freedom he is talking about is the freedom to act unconditionally and the disillusionment is the fact that that freedom is the initial state, in which no standard exists. Through expectations and performance, societies create the "cages" that limit that freedom in favour of the perpetration of standards. The only way to leave the cage is to conform. . Red Peter is now on a ship, a kind of society, confined to a cage. The sailors look at him and judge every movement he makes. At the same time, though, he looks at them and understands that, if he doesn't want to die he needs to go out of the cage, even if this does not mean being free. The only solution he can think of is to do what children do when they grow up: they imitate the motions of adults until their motions are so perfect and blend so much with their surroundings that they start being called adults in what Butler refers to as the "stylized repetition of acts"[368] that institutes identity.

What happens in a child is an evolution akin to biological evolution: there is no fixed point at which a child becomes an adult, just as there is no specific individual starting point of a new species. The two categories blend with each other and it is up to the beholder to define the growth of an individual, or to keep the parallel, if a person is male or female. When Red Peter breaks into speech, we understand he is on the right track on his evolution.

> One evening before a large circle of spectators—perhaps there was a celebration of some kind, a gramophone was playing, an officer was circulating among the crew—when on this evening, just as no one was looking, I took hold of a schnapps bottle that had been carelessly left standing before my cage, uncorked it in the best style, while the company began to watch me with mounting attention, set it to my lips without hesitation, with no grimace, like a professional drinker, with rolling eyes and full throat, actually and truly drank it empty; then threw the bottle away, not this time in despair but as an artistic performer; forgot, indeed, to rub my belly; but instead of that, because I could not help it, because my senses were reeling, called a brief and unmistakable "Hallo!" breaking into human speech, and with this outburst broke into the human community. (BA, 58)

In many languages we say someone "becomes an adult" when they have sex for the first time, because sex is something we associate exclusively with adults. Earlier in the story, Red Peter was incapable of putting his *Schwanz* through a hole he saw in the cage. Goodbody uses the most common translation of the term to say that Kafka was confusing apes and monkeys, because apes do not have tails.[369] However, Kafka may have willingly played with the term *Schwanz* to refer to the monkey's penis, which would not only confirm the sex of Red Peter, but also his status of a non-adult individual who has not had sex yet and is therefore not considered a "man". Mirroring what Castellucci observed several decades later,[370] the performance of the animal ends when Red Peter leaves the realm of the non-speaking infant. He enters into the human community when he performs the human act of speaking an intelligible language, something that is by definition a social standard. In her feminist perspective of science, Haraway observes that "language *generates* reality in the inescapable context of power" (italics in the original).[371] By speaking for the first time, the performative power of the word comes into play and Red Peter starts owning his new reality and changing his surroundings. After speaking Red Peter's first words, Hunter

[368] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (1988): 519-531.

[369] A. Goodbody, *Animal Studies*, 259.

[370] Castellucci, *Il Pellegrino della Materia*.

[371] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 78.

starts a dance under a completely different set of lights than before in a "play of intensities in celebration of the ambivalent achievement of human speech [...,] another subversion of the colonizing logic of masculinist humanism".[372] In *The Kafkian Monkey*, after his first words, Red Peter is not seen in his cage any longer, but starts occupying new areas of the stage, dominating the reality and building a rage that will climax at the end.

Unusually for his time, Kafka did not drink alcohol and associated drinking with his father, the symbolic male, so it is not surprising that Red Peter enters the world of humans as a male after a long struggle to learn how to drink. The act is only the culmination of a process, though. What Kafka is showing, and explicitly saying, is that with this single act the path has been definitely set and there is no way back. The ape can now really become a human thanks to the training received by the people around him. Or, to make the metaphor clearer, the a-gender body has now been shown to be a male, thanks to a society, that taught him how to behave to be a male.

After proving himself for the first time, Red Peter goes back to his usual self and habits, as it is normal to do every time someone manages to do something new, but is dismissive about it: in just a few words, his next life stage has begun. He is learning how to be a man: he gives a quick account of his teachers, mentions he learns from more than one at a time, just like an individual finds sources of inspiration for gender performance and the confirmation of gender roles in different areas of society. Red Peter even influences one of his teachers so much that he becomes an ape and is "hospitalized in a mental institution" (BA, 59), which can be a reference to society's ostracism towards someone who abandons gender roles after accepting them.

Kafka's open question can be formulated as: "If Red Peter has turned into a male/human without being born one, but just by imitation, how do we know what is a human (or a male)? Is there even an ontological one or is it always only an imitation?".

The last part of the monologue is what mainly distinguishes the two adaptations. Red Peter is now imitating men so well that he is undistinguishable from a born one. He drinks, he is the master of the house and he is abusive to his partner. At the end of the story, Red Peter describes his new life and partner:

> I half lie and half sit in my rocking chair and gaze out of the window: if a visitor arrives, I receive him with propriety. My manager sits in the anteroom; when I ring, he comes and listens to what I have to say. Nearly every evening I give a performance, and I have a success that could hardly be increased. When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from social gatherings, there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do. By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it (BA, 60).

Hunter in this section remains essentially the same character, with the exception, just before the quoted passage, of an angry "Smell me, smell me!" towards the audience which is not part of the original text. The addition suggests a wish to return to a primordial communication based on smells rather than words, a nostalgic remembrance of the past, underlined by the tone in which the half-trained chimpanzee is named. In *The Kafkian Monkey*, until then Red Peter was represented as an individual vividly re-embodying his youth and its innocence, but at this stage, he is a masculine man of the beginning of the twentieth century and therefore the interpretation changes significantly. This version of Red Peter builds up excitement and rage since he leaves the cage for good and at this stage he is aggressive, particularly towards the

[372] Williams, *Going Ape*.

audience. Talking about his present life, his words are cocky: the audience is inferior to him and his partner is a sexual tool in which he still sees some freedom, so he unloads on her the anger for what he has lost, something that she may still have, mirroring the behaviour of the sailor who used to beat him up. The acting here is quick and enraged, with a hint at abuse towards the partner. To become a human, Red Peter has to imitate what he experienced at the hands of the sailors. Kafka describes the abuses Red Peter had to endure and, now that he is in his final stage, it is not surprising he is abusive as well. He is, after all, perpetrating the standards that made him the gendered body he is now, so the feeling of entitlement is not an exception.

This final section also adds a new layer of uncertainty and perversion to the act of bestiality: if Red Peter has really become a human, why is he attracted (and repelled, as usually happens in Kafka's life and narrative involving heterosexual sex) by a chimp? The bestiality suggested here further perverts the distinction human/animal and at the same time puts Red Peter on the line between the two categories. If he was fully human, he would not be attracted to a chimp. As he is, there are two options: either he is genuinely becoming a man, but is not, yet, or he is only superficially performing as one. In the first case the abuse towards the *Schimpansin* is motivated by an unaccomplished performance of manliness. Although Dekoven argues that Kafka's model of masculinity involves the use of a female only as an instrument for sexual release,[373] in the *Letter to his Father*, Kafka describes his model for accomplished manliness as successful at "marrying, founding a family, accepting all the children that come, support them in this insecure world and even guiding them a little as well, [which is] the outmost a human being can succeed".[374] On the contrary, Kafka, as a failed man, used "the plans to marry [...as] the most large-scale and hopeful attempt at escape, and then the failure was on a correspondingly large scale" (a language similar to that used by Red Peter to describe freedom as "the most sublime of feelings and therefore its disappointment [is] equally sublime" in BA, 54). The use of the *Schimpansin* only for sexual relief mirrors the purely physical relationships Kafka had with prostitutes, but not the high, spiritual and accomplished married relationship of his father. The alternative is that Red Peter is not really a human, but only performing one for the academy. In this case, the attraction is inside his own species and the anger towards her may be due to the constant reminder of his only partial success to imitate human behaviour. In either case, Kafka is suggesting that the sexual instinct is one of the features common to both humans and animals. This instinct is not perverted in itself, because it is at the core of every life, but it generates perversions (or perverted behaviours).

A Report to an Academy combines all of the aspects of perversion described in this chapter as characteristic of Kafka's use of animals. The indeterminacy of Red Peter's race rendered through imitation and the occasional stereotype suggests a link to gender, common to drag. Performance and performativity are in his mimicry and in the address to the academy and every adaptation needs to re-create the story through actions, as well as words. Bestiality and the emotions originated by the cooperation of animals and humans are more evident in the final passage, but permeate the whole monologue. Witnessing this story as a theatre show, the audience is in direct dialogue with the character and all of these aspects become visually alive, allowing a better perception of the animal values in Kafka's narrative. The whole performance is perverted: Red Peter is never fully human or fully animal, never really an academic, never really the simple "everyman" that populates Kafka's stories, but he tries to be both and can only do it through mockery that becomes refined imitation. A theatre adaptation is the most effective way to represent the story: not only does it bring performativity to the fore, but the very essence of theatre and acting are based on an imitation that influences and is influenced by reality. Theatre representations raise questions about performativity itself, show perverse performance in place,

[373] Marianne Dekoven, "Kafka's Animal Stories," in *Creatural Fictions: Human-Animal Relationships in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Literature*, ed. David Herman (New York: Springer, 2016), 19-40.

[374] Kafka, *Letter to his Father*, 204.

pose questions about the real world and how it is affected by these perverse performances. Audiences are put in front of themselves and asked to wonder if what they are seeing is a temporary character of the performance or if their own performances are as perverted as those on stage.

CHAPTER FIVE

PUNISHMENT AND LAW: THE PERVERSION OF JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

The amount of published work dealing with Kafka's relationship with Law is impressive and almost always approaches it as a part of the legal discourse[375] or within rules and regulations of Kafka's time, with some notable exceptions. This chapter will offer a literary approach on the same topic, but from a different perspective. I show that Law in Kafka's stories is perverted from its "normality" through the creation of arbitrary standards and regulations. Together with a perverted application of punishments, Kafka's Law creates a perverted justice that imposes guilt as an involuntary condition and kills arbitrarily.

In Kafka's view, Law is a mechanism perverted by nature because it creates standards that limit what in the animal stories is described as real freedom and it is further perverted by the abuse of knowledge and power by the representatives of Law. Throughout this chapter I use the term "law" to indicate the state law and the capitalized word "Law" to refer to a second, higher, more complex system used by Kafka that dominates his stories, including those that do not directly mention it.

The reason to talk about Law is that it is the mechanism that creates and enforces the social standards that are subsequently perverted and punishes the perversion. Kafka's Law is not representative of a binary like those explored in the previous chapters (male/female and animal/human), but it is their origin and the lens through which another important dualism is determined: guilt/innocence. Like the other two couples, these terms seem self-explanatory, but Kafka perverts them through the process of punishment, explored in the third section of this chapter. It is impossible to determine the origin of this Law, like that of other standards. In *The Problems with Our Laws* Kafka explains that only the nobles know the truth, but there is room to think it is created by a superior and arbitrary force lost in time and space. The lack of objective answers and sources means that no one can be held responsible for the creation of the Law. This superior Law, like the state law, uses standards of "right and wrong" that are hard to define, to the point that, Teubner wonders, it cannot be said if it is right or wrong to explore them.[376] Their consistency is constantly put in doubt by the fact that these standards are perverted by social powers and social standards, created by people who, like the aforementioned nobles, claim to speak for the Law, but no one knows if this is really the case. The arbitrary nature of the Law means that its use is not always identical and perfectly applicable to every story or novel, but some of its elements are recurring and can be considered essential.

Kafka's Law is both performative and perverted: without the perversion of the standards that it creates, the Law itself would be forgot. When a standard is perverted, the audience of that perversion is reminded of the standard itself and of the Law that created that standard. This implies Kafka's Law is perverted because it fights and needs perversions at the same time, and is performative because it creates the need for itself. Although it may seem that in this context the term "perversion" is used in its pejorative meaning, I am still referring to it as a subversive strategy. Society expects Law to be impartial and silent until broken, but its perverted nature, as Kafka shows, demands to be broken in order to keep existing. Perversion is part of its nature and not a deliberately harmful act, even when it leads to harmful consequences. To show its consequences, I focus on the use of punishments in Kafka's stories, as this is the most obvious,

[375] For a short list, see Banakar, *In Search of Heimat*, 467.

[376] Gunther Teubner, "The Law Before its law: Franz Kafka on the Impossibility of Law's Self-reflection," *German Law Journal* 14 (2013): 405-422.

and frequent consequence of breaking or not understanding the Law. Starting from an objective and historical view of the Law in Kafka's time and his legal studies, I then analyse the evolution and understanding of punishment from its Biblical use to a secular application. The perversion and performance of Law and punishment has been used by Kafka and his adapters in several forms and this will be the topic of the second half of this chapter. Starting from Kafka's biographical prose, the *Letter to His Father*, I move into the fictitious realm and discuss how his works and some of their film adaptations perform Law and punishment.

KAFKA'S LAW: SECULAR AND TEMPORAL CREATION OF RULES

It would be too simplistic to consider Kafka's use of Law as utterly unrelated to reality: to fully understand his Law, we need to realize that Kafka starts from an existing legal system that, through exaggerations and perversions, acquires unique performativity. In previous criticism, Kafka's Law has been seen as peculiar and unique. However, Kafka is not creating a new legal system: like every other perversion, the perversion of Law finds its blueprint in reality. Furthermore, I suggest that the perversion of Law is the archetypal perversion, because it is through this Law that every standard is created and maintained.

Robin West maintains that Kafka's law is not law, because it follows premises that do not match our understanding of it. However, I partially disagree: the premise is correct, but my conclusion is that Kafka is showing a perverted Law. I do not see what West, quoting Posner, calls "malevolent whimsy":[377] regardless of how incoherent and incomprehensible its behaviour and demands are, Law is the ultimate originator of standards and does not have a will. Law should be followed with pleasure, as long as it is not changed arbitrarily: "Imposition of the Law! The happiness in obeying the law. But the law cannot merely be imposed upon the world and then everything left to go on as before, except that the new lawgiver be free to do as he pleases. Such would be not law, but arbitrariness, revolt against law, self-defeat".[378] The use of the word *sondern* to say "but" suggests that what comes afterwards is the opposite of the law and the two words *Willkür* and *Selbstverurteilung* imply that laws have an effect on the self, limiting will and conviction. However, given the prior context of *Glück dieser Gesetzvertreue*, this limitation is a positive effect, when the law is not imposed. In this passage Kafka shows that it is not the Law to be malevolent, but those who pervert it and remain unchallenged. Lawgivers have to be scrutinized and criticized, otherwise their use of the Law becomes the perversion showed in his narrative. In *The Problem with our Laws* and *The Refusal*, Kafka shows what happens when this is not done: to dominate undisturbed, lawgivers rely on the people's implicit acceptance of every imposition. The system is so perverted that the population expects their legitimate requests to be denied and is surprised when they are accepted.

An inner knowledge of legal studies put Kafka in the perfect situation to describe how real procedures could be perceived from a layman's perspective: those who suffer the actions of the Law are like audience members watching a performance develop and operate on their life. Law is both a performance, as it uses a specific language and code to be expressed, and performative, as it obtains results and creates effects in reality. In a performance, actors and crew know what is going to happen and how to make it happen and control the audience's experience. To do this they need a series of costumes, sets and lines that have been pre-established and take the audience members away from reality. Something similar happens with the Law: lawyers, judges, ushers and every other personality involved in a trial know how to behave and speak.[379] they make official vows, wear specific clothes and wigs, have spaces designed for a specific

[377] Robin West, *Narrative, Authority, and Law* (East Lansig: Michigan UP, 1993), 81.

[378] Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1923*, letter 1st November 1921.

[379] Neal Feigeson, *Legal Blame: How Jurors Think and Talk About Accidents* (Washington: American Psychological association, 2001).

purpose,[380] including raised "stages" for the judges, spectators' galleries and side doors. All of this gives legitimacy to the trial and creates a space for the suspension of disbelief in "theatre". The accused individuals can only trust everyone to be performing correctly and follow them through the whole procedure, becoming part of the performance themselves.[381] Regardless of receiving a punishment or not, the result of the trial is a new condition of the accused person as innocent (or "still innocent") or guilty ("not innocent anymore") in the eyes of society. Hannah Arendt was very aware of the performance implicit in every trial when she describes the Eichmann trial. She deduces that the location of the trial must have been planned as a theatre and therefore "not a bad place for the show trial David Ben-Gurion, prime Minister of Israel, had in mind"[382] The comparisons with theatre are countless and underline how a trial can be similar to a theatrical performance, as often happens for propaganda reasons[383] and as explicitly acknowledged and even defended as a positive technique by some critics.[384]

Kafka perverts the whole legal structure by giving power to people who have not be appointed by any authority, by stripping places and people of Law of their formal look and purpose. Lawyers and lawmakers become overly-respected performers who go through the motions of legal practice, sadists and exploiters who crave for power and sex and do not do or know much more than the victims of the Law. In such a landscape of abuse and misappropriation of legal skills, labels like innocence and guilt are removed, their performance is perverted. In the absence of clear laws everything is a potential crime (*The Problem with Our Laws*) and every major change of condition will be refused by lawmakers and judges afraid to lose their privileged status (*The Refusal*). Therefore, anyone's condition could be that guiltiness at any time and without their knowledge. It is only a matter of being found out and formally accused.

Banakar's essay shows how Kafka was inspired by his understanding of the real law when describing perversions: he points out that Kafka's education as a lawyer made it easier for him to pervert reality at the level of the reader. Kafka was "trained to select elements to bring order to [the chaos that constitutes everyday life], dislodge them from their context, and reconstruct them through a formal style that claims to be factual, objective, conceptually exact, coherent and concise".[385] What Banakar is confirming here is that the dystopian elements are still based on reality and relatable to their original state. He suggests this only happens in a legal environment, but I showed in the previous chapters how this is extended to other. Further evidence of the source of Kafka's legal reality is brought by Martha Robinson, who discusses the Austrian legal system to show how "whatever structure [*The Trial*] has, is provided by the world or a parody of it".[386] One of the examples that she brings is the Germanization of the Austro-Hungarian system under the Habsburg regime that allowed preliminary investigations of accused individuals to be based on ungrounded accusations, even if these did not result in imprisonment. Kafka overturns this procedure in *The Trial*, treating the start of an investigation like an arrest without imprisonment. The feeling of guilt deriving from an investigation, even if unfounded, becomes the essence of the novel: Josef K.'s becomes guilt because he has been arrested and his accusation is irrelevant. The arrest is performative in the same way as Austin's performative acts are: it changes the status of the individual on a social level. The treatment of the investigations as if it was an arrest derives from Kafka's criticism, if not fear, of secret investigations, a phenomenon

[380] David Evans, "Theatre of Deferral: the Image of the Law and the Architecture of the Inns of Court," *Law and Critique* 10, no.1 (1999): 1-25.

[381] Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow, Katya Johanson, ed., *The Audience Experience: A Critical Analysis of the Audience in Performing Arts* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013).

[382] Arendt, *Eichmann*, 4.

[383] George H. Hodos, *Show Trials* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1987).

[384] Mark J. Osiel, "In Defense of Liberal Show Trials – Nuremberg and Beyond," in *Perspectives on the Nuremberg Trial*, ed. Guenael Mettraux (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 704-727.

[385] Banakar, *In Search of Heimat*, 477

[386] Robinson, *The Law of the State in Kafka's 'The Trial'*, 127.

implied in several other stories, like *The Judgment* and *The Knock at the Manor Gate*, in which two siblings are imprisoned by an angry mob for the trivial "crime" of knocking at the gate of a manor. As no one is around at the time of the knocking, some hidden research is implied, the consequences of which are paid by the siblings, ignorant of laws and traditions of the area. Ignorance is often claimed or implied by Kafka's characters, but this is not a proper defence today, just as it was not in Kafka's days.[387] Kittler slightly disagrees with Robinson,[388] seeing in some events described in *The Trial* not only Kafka's criticism of some procedures, but also a return to the "Inquisitionsprinzip in modernen Untersuchungsverfahren",[389] but both agree the inspiration stems from reality. In this perspective, both are essentially describing the foundational principle of perversion used throughout this thesis, but they are isolating its use to Law.

The presence of an absolute Law, its perversion through its representatives and guilt as a starting point allow a further comparison between Law and Abrahmitic religions. As mentioned in the second chapter when referring to his friendship with Yitzchak Löwy and the later desire to move to Palestine, Kafka became increasingly involved with Judaism throughout his life. This may have influenced his writings to the point of using what seems to be the Judaic legal system in his writings. This already happens in existing legal systems: in the already mentioned Eichmann trial, the defendant's lawyer claimed that "Eichmann feels guilty before God, but not before the law".[390]

The modern rule of law demands laws to be part of a unified legal system with appropriate sources and to be used on everyone. On the contrary, because "Judaism rejects the idea of the autonomy of moral law, i.e., that reason and rationality are the sources of ethics",[391] the Judaic legal system, or *halakhah*, allows judges to recommend a behaviour rather than base their decision on a specific rule: in this legal system, litigants do not ask what they are due, but implicitly ask the judges to help them in their contention.[392] The reason for this is that in the Jewish system God is a role model uniting ethical and religious teachings and his law has to be followed, as that is considered to be the origin of every law. Without ever mentioning God, Kafka shows how such a system can be perverted: in his stories, characters who are innocent in front of the secular law are accused or guilty in front of a Law based on role models and subjective standards.

The emancipation process of West European Jewry that began less than a century before Kafka's birth "gradually gave Jews rights as *individual* citizens [...] while simultaneously eliminating the *collective* privileges of the traditional communities".[393] With the loss of collective autonomy within the Jewish community, the individual is left alone in a system that does not represent him and he is not fit to understand. The feeling of lack of guidance and community is represented in Kafka's Law, as it separates individuals to be more powerful over them through its representatives. In *Before the Law* the man from the country is left alone for his whole life while trying to enter into the Law through an entrance built exclusively for him. Had he had help against the warden, maybe he would have been able to enter the Law, but the representative of the Law is too scary to try and overcome him. Even Josef K. in *The Trial* finds himself surrounded by other accused men with whom there is no interaction or community. Welles

[387] *Austrian Penal Act Concerning Felonies and Gross and Petty Misdemeanors*, quoted in Robinson, *The Law of the State in Kafka's 'The Trial"*,131.

[388] Wolf Kittler, "Heimlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit: Das österreichisce Strafprozessrecht in Franz Kafkas Roman 'Der Prozeß'," *The Germanic Review* 78, no.3 (2003): 194-222.

[389] Ibid., 175.

[390] Quoted in Arendt, *Eichmann*, 21.

[391] Michael Kaufman, *The Woman in Jewish Law and Tradition* (Lanham: Jason Aronson, 1993), 4.

[392] Hanina Ben-Menahem, "Post-script: the Judicial Process and the Nature of Jewish Law," in *An Introduction to the History and Sources of Jewish Law*, ed. Neil S. Hecht et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 421-436.

[393] David Novak, *Modern Responsa: 1800 to the Present*, in *An Introduction to the History and Sources of Jewish law,* 379.

understood the perversion of a situation forcing people living a common drama to be alone by showing a group of people standing in a field, still and separated like tombstones. They are all emaciated, show resigned expressions, wear only underwear, blanket and identification numbers reminiscent of prisoners in concentration camps, stressing the link with the Jewish people.

Banakar maintains that the procedures described by Kafka belong to modern Law and not to the Talmud. He suggests that "the inaccessibility of justice and the obscurity of the source of legal authority [...] distinguish[es] Kafka's law not only from religious law, but also from traditional natural law".[394] While it is correct to maintain that the absence of clarity and sources distinguishes Kafka's law from the traditional natural law, this cannot be said about religious law. However, I argue that they is a perversion of the secular Law through the proceedings of a Talmudic-like, arbitrary law. Secular and religious laws combine into a unique system, far from distinguishing Kafka's Law from religious law, as Banakar thinks. Kafka's legal system seems to be official, but it is treated by its representative as arbitrary, divine: it demands a behaviour without explaining its reasons. "[T]he highly specialised Law of our functionally differentiated society cannot comprehensively assess its law and decide whether it is true or untrue, good or evil, beneficial or damaging [...], just or unjust",[395] which implies that rules and regulations, the standards, are decided based on traditions, the origin of which are lost in time. This matches the description of laws and their application in *The Problem with Our Laws*, where, as in the Talmud and the deriving Jewish trials, two opposing opinions of judges can be valid at the same time, regardless of the contention's nature.[396]

The scholarly consensus is almost unanimous in placing *The Judgment* within a religious context, too. In the story, Georg Bendemann's father imposes an arbitrary sentence on his son, who has not committed any real crime, but nonetheless the death sentence is executed by the son himself. Hiob argues that the text is inspired by the Talmud and the Bible and is implicitly critiquing the religious ideology while allowing justice to prevail.[397] Hartwich shows a parallel with parables,[398] Berman suggests the Yom Kippur[399] was a source[400] and Grötzinger shows the plot similarity with the Yiddisch play *Gott, Mensch and Teufel* that Kafka was familiar with, as well as other Jewish sources.[401] Kafka himself seems to be aware with the disproportionate religious punishments for the lack of respect when, commenting the story in a letter to his sister Elli, says that if children do not obey their parents, "they will not be kicked out or anything like that [...] but cursed or consumed or both".[402] According to Hiob, Georg cannot have been punished for disrespecting his father, because death by drowning seems to him an excessive, perverted punishment and therefore he proceeds to list other possible sins Georg could be guilty of. Hiob is not taking into consideration Deuteronomy 21:18-21, in which God commands to stone the disobedient children after having brought them in front of the judges and that "no measure is too drastic for the Eastern Jewish folk tale dealing with [the theme of disobedience against the power]".[403] Regardless of Georg's sin, the religious influence in Kafka's Law is apparent in the perverse brutality of the punishment when compared to the crime.

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[394] Ibid., 380.

[395] Teubner, "The Law before its Law," 410.

[396] Ben-Menahem, "Post-script," 427.

[397] Oliver Hiob, "Kafka and the Rabbis: Re-reading "The Judgment" in Light of Rabbinic Law," *Monatshefte* 104, no.3 (2012): 346-358.

[398] Wolf-Daniel Hartwich, "Böser Trieb, Märtyrer und Sündenbock: Religiöse Metaphorik in Franz Kafkas Urteil," *Deutsch Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft* 67, no.3 (1993): 521-540.

[399] The holiest day in Jewish tradition, considered the day of atonement and during which Jewish people ask God for forgiveness. In 1912, it happened just before the night during which Kafka wrote the whole story.

[400] Russell A. Berman, "Tradition and Betrayal in 'Das Urteil'," in *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*, ed. James Rollerston (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 85-99.

[401] Grötzinger, *Kafka and Kabbalah,* 121-126.

[402] Kafka, *Letters*, 345.

[403] Grötzinger, *Kafka and Kabbalah*, 125.

Kafka does not mention God, but his Law derives from an invisible entity with unclear motivations and whose decisions, however perverted, are constantly claimed to be the reason for the perverted behaviour of its representatives. It is impossible to know whether the source of Law is the will of these representatives or a father-like figure of the same kind explored as a perverted gender in Chapter three. The final result is the condemnation to punishments to keep the performance of power alive.

THE PERVERSION OF PUNISHMENT

Kafka's punishments are performances used by representatives of power more to confirm themselves through fear and to remind of the existence of power than to redeem and improve society. The role and standards of punishment have been described before in legal and philosophical literature, but Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* provides their most thorough analysis throughout the ages. Using his observations, the perversion of punishment in Kafka's stories becomes more apparent.

In Kafka's narrative, guilt and Law are strictly connected. Both are assumed and taken for granted, but at the same time are caused by a god-like, authoritative and transcendent entity that may or may not exist and perpetrated by its self-appointed representatives, as a good part of contemporary critique confirms by focusing on aspects of the relationship between real laws and Kafka's Law, as well as guilt.[404] Whatever the source of Law and guilt, what ultimately characterizes Kafka's stories is the punishment for not following the supreme, non-coded Law. However, if the Law is perverted, its punishment can only be equally perverted. The perversion of punishment is particularly visible in the target, methodology and the scope of punishment.

According to retributive justice, the best way to punish someone is to inflict upon them the same pain or harm that the offender has inflicted upon their victim. The "eye for an eye" punishment is the first and primordial reaction to the moral outrage[405] and the most imposed punishment in ancient law codes like the *Deuteronomy* and other holy books. The more serious is the crime, the harsher is the punishment. Foucault suggests that codes of law define the crimes and offences, treating them as juridical objects, but "judgment is also passed on the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity".[406] As I show in the next section, in the autobiographical sources, particularly the *Letter to His Father*, Kafka refers to what Foucault listed as sources of guilt and remorse as a recurring state of his persona. In Kafka's fiction, recognizable crimes are hardly ever mentioned and are often petty, disproportionately punished, suggesting that the act that is being punished is only the most superficial manifestation of a bigger guilt. The clearest example is *In the Penal Colony*, in which a soldier is punished with torture and death for not saluting an officer, but the already mentioned *The Knock at the Manor Gate* also shows the disproportionate punishment inflicted on minor crimes. None of these punishments is the consequence of a decision taken during a trial, because there is no trial, or at least none to which the accused person can take part to. There may be hearings, but these are perversions of the ritual, as they are formalities: the fate has already been decided, thus nullifying the whole point of a hearing. The whole "complex social function [of punishment]"[407] is now missing, the punishment becomes a violent act committed by the Law, different from the criminal act simply because of the Law's representatives own attribution of a role that no one can justify or explain.

Foucault notices that "the perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes,

[404] See many of the works cited so far, as well as the most recent Roberto Buonamano, "Kafka and Legal Critique," *Griffith Law Review* 25, no.4 (2016): 581-599.

[405] John M. Darley, Thane S. Pittman, "The Psychology of Compensatory and Retributive Justice," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 7, no.4 (2003): 324-336.

[406] Ibid., 17.

[407] Ibid., 23

excludes. In short, it *normalizes*" (183, italics in the original). Through punishment, he explains, authorities establish and maintain a system that cannot be challenged. This system is so ingrained that it is considered "normal" to the point of not being questioned anymore. Kafka's Law acts in the same way: because of its performative character, it creates standards, the "normality", and then punishes in a perverted fashion, because no aspect of this normality can be challenged. This also explains why Kafka's sentences are exaggerated: every act that attempts to destabilize the "normality" is equally serious and therefore deserves death. Kafka's Law is at a stage in which its representatives, through religion and society, are beyond their role of "forbid[ding] men to do what their instincts incline them to do"[408] and have started regulating and forbidding every behaviour, arbitrarily deciding which ones are positive and which ones are not. However, the "normality" cannot be taken for granted, or the presence of the Law could be forgot and with it the importance of its representatives. This explains why, in a perverted reversal of roles, "A cage went to look for a bird".[409] The normalization is unlikely to be sincere: every form of punishment normalizes forcefully what is arbitrarily considered correct. Every system behind the Law has become the totem discussed by Freud: a covenant between a father entity and those who ask for protection, care and indulgence. However, social groups have gone beyond the primordial, natural status, therefore the entities that represent (or claim to represent) the father try to "normalize" their authority and behaviour by creating standards that are no more specific than the difference between "animal" and "human" discussed in the previous chapter and punish the "other".

Kafka's punishments are perverted because they always lead to one result: immediate death or isolation until a slow death arrives. Both scenarios indicate an exclusion from a "normal" society with no option to go back to it. This perverted punishment stems from Judaism, according to which "the judgment of the soul and its torture in the grave (Hibbut ha-kever) as well as the punishment of the soul in Gehinnom (purgatory), which lasted twelve months at the most, come at the end of each person's life".[410] It is indicative that Josef K.'s events described in *The Trial* last exactly one year before he is punished, as if the human punishment had saved him from the godly torture of finding himself in the perverted world of accused men. The punishment inflicted upon individuals is based on their action, known by the all-knowing God who takes everything into consideration and administers an appropriate punishment. This matches one of Kafka's law professors', Hans Groß, idea that every gesture and statement of the accused must be recorded in order to find the truth.[411] In *Reflections on Sin, Suffering, Hope and the True Way*, Kafka insists in more than one occasion that "All human errors are impatience [...] It was because of impatience that [humans] were expelled from Paradise [...] Because of impatience they do not return".[412] When judged by a higher entity like Kafka's Law, it is consistent to inflict only one punishment, if there is only one crime. As Mladek also points out, God is often present in the courts: "the law mimics the divine performance not only by speaking nothing but the truth but, as with the sentence, by carrying it out violently".[413]

Through punishments, societies mimic the divine in an attempt to get to an objective truth and balance a cosmic scale in the search for an ultimate Justice. Kafka uses punishments in the same spirit, but he was raised by a father who favoured fear as a punitive method and educated as a lawyer in a society marked by its punitive character. He was also aware that punishments are supposed to have a corrective nature, capable, through exercise and repetition, of bringing the guilty person back on track to the norm or redeem through gratification.[414] The punitive and

[408] Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 123.
[409] Kafka, *Wedding Preparations in the Country*, 40.
[410] Grötzinger, *Kafka and Kabbalah*, 33.
[411] Hans Groß, *Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter als System der Kriminalistik* (Munich: Schweitzer, 1908).
[412] Kafka, *Wedding Preparations in the Country*, 38.
[413] Mladek, *Radical Play*, 233.
[414] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 178.

corrective spirits of punishment clash in his literature and originate the perverted punishments. In Kafka's literature the usual scopes of punishments are lost and they become a tool used by the Law to maintain and confirm itself, regardless of correction or rehabilitation. In *The Penal Colony* Kafka seems to be aware of the most difficult goal of rehabilitation: to take away the will to offend again by changing the offender's personal situation without being patronising and ignoring the reasons for crime causation. In the story, in fact, there is an attempt to punish and rehabilitate by making the victim of the machine understand their guilt after pain and torment. The punishment's performative role is perverted by the lack of audience and the rehabilitative goal is perverted by the death of the victim. The lack of audience is the main perversion of most of Kafka's punishments: societies punish their components and pay public and private officials to administer punishments in the search for justice, but "Punishment also serves important functions bearing on group cohesion, particularly in solidifying support for the legitimacy of norms among the non-offending members of the group".[415] Even more perverse is the loss of the performance of the "theatre of punishments [establishing] a relation that is immediately intelligible to the senses and on which a simple calculation may be based".[416] Without an audience, punishments can only hope to educate the victim. The educational scope of a solitary death sentence is lost and therefore the role of the punishment itself is perverted, particularly when it is preceded by torture that does not even scare the victim for the future. The only alternative audience that could learn from the punishment is the readers, but even we are lost and learn nothing: the "attraction to physical and psychic suffering [enveloping] the nomo-theatrical task of delivering justice"[417] disappears in a perverted performance of buffoonery that leads to death for a trivial, if not unknown, crime. The officer of *The Penal Colony* is also aware of it and is nostalgic about the time in which there used to be an audience, but the solitary and pointless nature of a death sentence is a recurring perversion. Josef K. is executed away from everyone and the protagonist of one of the fragments in *The Eight Octavo Note-books* is a prisoner who kills himself in the middle of the night simply because he thought the gallows was being erected for him. The privacy of the punishment does not mean that Kafka's punishments are not performative. The performative aspect of every punishment is caused by the killing of a scapegoat to punish the undefined sin and appease the law-maker, whoever he is. Going back to Eichmann's process Arendt maintains he was a scapegoat, as the trial aimed at punishing him not only for the suffering he caused to Jewish people, but for "all the facts of Jewish suffering".[418]

Although Kurt Fickert focuses on the last stories to find a true scapegoat[419] and Ward sees this aspect mostly in *The Trial*,[420] every killing of Kafka's characters is representative of a behaviour that needs to be eliminated in order to establish a *status quo* allowing the bureaucratic legal machine to be normalised and work again. The best example of this is offered in *The Metamorphosis*, in which the family, as a reflection of society, is reborn once Gregor is eliminated. What is eliminated in the story is not Gregor himself, but the useless individual, the corruption of the established standard, whose deeper wishes are so perverted in the eyes of society that he physically becomes a parasite and, once killed, shows how the elimination of every parasite can improve society. As Foucault argues, crime has a social role, as it highlights the troubles of society: crime is indiscipline that creates disorder and rapture, but eventually raises questions about what is considered "normal" or "stationary" in society and if it is worth being

[415] Michael Ross, ed., *The Justice Motive in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 293.

[416] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 126.

[417] Mladek, *Radical Play*, 233.

[418] Arendt, *Eichmann*, 6.

[419] Kurt J. Fickert, *End of a Mission: Kafka's Search for Truth in his Last Stories* (London: Camden House, 1993).

[420] Bruce K. Ward, "Giving Voice to Isaac: The Sacrificial Victim in Kafka's Trial," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 22, no.2 (2004): 64-84.

considered such. However, Kafka's characters are guilty of a crime whose sole existence perverts standards. Being external observers, we can wonder what crime they have actually committed and what are those standards, but from the internal perspective of the story, the mere performance of their existence is what needs to be punished.

After having discussed the perversions of Law and clarified how it needs the performance of punishment to establish itself, I would now like to examine the application of these perversions in some of the most relevant stories written by Kafka, starting from the work that could be seen as a mix of fiction and autobiography: the *Letter to His Father*.

LETTER TO HIS FATHER: A PERVERTED TRIAL

In the second chapter I mentioned the *Letter to His Father* and quoted one of Kafka's letters to Milena in which he claimed to have used some "lawyerly tricks" (*alle advokatorische Kniffe*).[421] It can be argued, though, that the whole letter is a legal document showing Kafka's understanding of the Law. To expand on what Müller-Seidel maintains,[422] the letter can be considered among Kafka's works of prose, not only for the stylistic and thematic elements, but also for the visual and cinematic language used throughout the letter. Kafka's style in an autobiographical piece like this is influenced by his background, but also by his visual style. To show how autobiography and narrative influence each other, I compare the style and the conclusion of the letter with *The Judgment*, one of the stories that are most influenced by the father-son relationship.

The letter is divided in episodes telling several stories of Kafka's life, narrated with visual precision and linked by the common thread of a self-analysis of life with his father. In a cinematographic environment, it could be possible to adapt the narration into a trial during which a lawyer is presenting his case for an unknown accusation and each episode is a flashback. Only at the end the perversion of the trial becomes apparent, as lawyer, defendants and judge are the same two people, making it impossible to understand who was accusing whom. Although the trial seems to have been making a case against the father, Kafka's goal in the journey through time and events is to find reconciliation by answering the question that inspired the whole letter and make the father understand why, even as an adult, Franz is scared of his own father.

The shifting of roles is a recurring theme in Kafka's narrative, also used by his adapters to reproduce his style. In the final scene of Welles' *The Trial*, Josef K. is about to be killed, but he scares the executioners with his judging tone and proud laughter. His expected performance is that of a victim, afraid and passive, but through a close-up on Anthony Perkins' eyes shifting from one executioner to the other while they pass the knife to each other, Welles takes power away from the representatives of the Law and gives it to the victim. The two sides change roles and Josef at the end laughs and grabs the dynamite that kills him, indirectly approving his own homicide and becoming his own judge and executioner. In *The Judgment* the relationship between father and son keeps shifting: the two perform different roles towards each other and on an absolute scale. In the first half of the story, when Georg takes care of his father like a child, we see what Freud said was relationship with the sacred totem: "a covenant with [the] father, in which he promised [him] everything that a childish imagination may expect from a father – protection, care, indulgence- while on their side they undertook to respect his life, that is to say, not to repeat the deed which had brought destruction on their *real* father".[423] I emphasized the word "real" because, in the second half of the interaction, Georg's father becomes the omnipotent, godly father with ultimate authority, the judge that can decide the death of the disobedient children, rather than the father who educates and punishes reasonably. Even his physicality changes: although Georg keeps having the perception of him as a giant, he switches

[421] Franz Kafka, *Letters to Milena* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), 63.
[422] Müller-Seidel, *Franz Kafkas 'Brief an den Vater".*
[423] Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 144.

from the man with childish "enormous pupils", who needs his son to be dressed properly and that can be easily lifted, to the apparently real giant who can throw the blanket "so violently that it unfolded completely in the air" and holds "one hand lightly on the ceiling".[424] This last pose is reminiscent of a God who holds the sky with one hand while judging with the other. The disembodiment of the father-judge from the carnal father is complete when Herr Bendemann starts listing the accusations: "You disgraced our mother's memory, betrayed your friend and put your father in bed so that he can't move".[425] The use of possessive adjectives of this sentence denotes how the father is increasingly farther from the reality Georg is part of. In the first event, the mother is *unsere* (our), as if father and son were one. The second event is the betrayal of the friend, the child Herr Bendemann would have preferred to have, being what Georg is not. He is referred to with a generic *den Freund* (literally "the friend" instead of "your friend"), as to indicate that he could be anyone's friend, but father and son are not one anymore. The third event shows the distance between the two faces of the father, as the person who was put in bed is not the same standing on the bed: *deinen Vater*. The constant shifting of roles and behaviours matches Kafka's habit of "invent[ing] more and more roles and [multiplying] and [superimposing] masks and courtroom stages".[426]

The letter shows the performative aspect of the Law. Kafka's father (a personification of Law) obtains different effects on his audience (the child) through behaviours that can be situated in a specific time, as Kafka does throughout the letter. As I show below the father acts with grandeur, stresses his power over the child and the family, or even acts as if he was going to do something excessive. The father is represented as having power of life and death over his children and shows it by constantly threatening to punish, even if he never does, therefore relying on fear to do the job. However, this fear is the quintessential perversion of a punishment, as it does not create an understanding of any wrong-doing, nor its redemption, but only generates guilt. The memory of those feelings is so vivid in the adult Kafka that he describes in detail how they originated:

> The shouting, the way your face got red, the hasty undoing of the braces and the laying of them ready over the back of the chair [...]. It is like when someone is going to be hanged. If he is really hanged, then he's dead and it's all over. But if he has to go through all the preliminaries to being hanged and only when the noose is dangling before his face is told of his reprieve, then he may suffer from it all his life long. [...] here again what accumulated was only a huge sense of guilt. On every side I was to blame, I was in debt to you.[427]

In this quote, Kafka describes to the reader the performance of his father's tyranny. Like the nobles who manage the Law, Kafka's father does not administer his power through reasoned judgment and measured punishments. Instead, he perverts his role of father into that of an executioner, establishes standards that are not understood by his subordinates (his children) and punishes those who challenge them. To be kept and respected, this perversion of roles requires a performance and the quote above serves this purpose. Here Kafka shows the father as a performer who wears the costume of anger and performs the role of the executioner, albeit one who, like an actor, is not actually going to kill anyone. Nonetheless, the act is performative, as it successfully subdues the child and establishes fear.

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[424] Ibid., 67.
[425] Kafka, *Complete Stories*, 69.
[426] Mladek, *Radical Play*, 243.
[427] F. Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 177.

At the beginning of the letter, Kafka sets the stage by explaining why the "trial" is taking place: to answer his father's question as comprehensively as possible, even if the father himself does not seem to understand the difficulty to answer the question. Kafka sums up what they know and think of each other.

> You asked me recently why I maintain I am afraid of you. As usual, I was unable to think of any answer to your question [...] if I now try to give you an answer in writing, it will still be very incomplete, because even in writing this fear and its consequences hamper me in relation to you [...].
>
> To you the matter always seemed very simple [...]. It looked to you more or less as follows: you have worked hard all your life, have sacrificed everything for your children, above all for me, consequently I have lived like a 'fighting-cock' [...you] have expected at least some form of obligingness, some sign of sympathy. Instead I have always dodged you, [...] I have never taken any interest in the business or your other concerns [...] while I do everything for my friends.[428]

Kafka criticism to power by birthright is expressed here through the admission of a preference for his friends over his family. Kafka is a victim of the perverted performances of anger he suffered in life and is therefore scared by the authoritative figure even while writing the letter. The second half of the quote is the father's perspective of why he should be owed respect: he performed every action that, from his perspective, a father should do. Nonetheless, in what could be seen as a modern criticism to authority, Kafka does not treat his father with the expected reverence and favours his friends. He perceives his father's behaviour as that of a legal attacker and expresses it through his language (my emphasis):

> If you sum up your *judgment* of me, the result you get is that although you don't *charge* me with anything downright improper or wicked (with the exception perhaps of my latest marriage-plan), you do *charge* me with coldness, estrangement and ingratitude. And, what is more, you *charge* me with it in such a way as to make it seem *it were my fault* [...], while you aren't in the slightest to *blame*.[429]

The emphasized words have the same effect in German (if not more, given that the first is also the title of a story in which the father plays a key role): *Urteil, vorwirfst, wäre es meine Schuld, du nicht die geringste Schuld hast*. The perverted nature of the judgments mirrors the *The Trial*, because none of these accusations is a real crime. The father behaves like a victim to whom something has been taken away (gratitude and familiarity, mostly). As he expressed in another letter quoted above, Kafka advocates for following the law, as long as authority and power are based on reasoning and treated as a right coming with a self-appointed role (like that of a father).

Seeing that his child does not respect him as expected, Kafka's father perverts his own role by being judge and executioner of sentences. Kafka's only memory of his childhood is related to a punishment that scarred him for life. In that event, Kafka was asking for water "partly to be annoying, partly to amuse [him]self".[430] Exasperated by the nagging child, the father brought him on the balcony and left him there in the cold with only his nightgown. What could seem as

[428] Ibid., 157.
[429] Ibid., 158.
[430] Ibid., 162.

a harsh, but not excessively cruel punishment, reveals the nature of the relationship between father and son, as well as the effect of the father's actions over Kafka. The punishment is perverted because it has no educational role: although it reached its goal of stopping the child from being annoying, the child did not understand what was wrong with his behaviour. He only "suffered from the tormenting fancy that the huge man, [his] father, the ultimate authority, would come almost for no reason at all and take [him] out of bed in the night and carry [him] out on to the *pavlatche* [a balcony], and that therefore [he] was such a mere nothing for him".[431] Kafka's concept of Law as an arbitrary and supreme authority originated and is personified in the father. There is again a perverted form of respect based on fear rather than acknowledgment of authority. The Father/Law does not need to give any explanation or justification for his arbitrary behaviour and has no intention to be friendly or positively reinforce whoever is dominated by him, unless they are following his rule and command.

Kafka's criticism to self-appointed power as a perversion of genuine power is explicitly spelled out by describing the father as a tyrannic ruler:

> From your armchair you ruled the world. Your opinion was correct, every other was mad, wild, *meschugge*, not normal. [...] you had no need to be consistent and yet never ceased to be in the right [...]. For me you took on the enigmatic quality that all tyrants have whose rights are based on their person and not on reason.[432]

These lines sum up every key concept expressed so far. The father establishes standards, correct because established by him and not because logical or meaningful. His power is shown through the direction of performances that he is allowed not to follow. Arbitrary standards that he, and only he, can ignore without consequences. At the table "there could be no discussion of the goodness of the food-but you yourself often found the food uneatable [...]. Bones mustn't be cracked with the teeth, but you could. Vinegar must not be sipped noisily, but you could [...] At the table one wasn't allowed to do anything but eat, but you cleaned and cut your fingernails, sharpened pencils, cleaned your ears with toothpick".[433] The simple and dry list of acts the father was allowed to do and the "you could" indicates the fatherly assumption that the father's will was everything needed for him to break a performance from his side, as a creator and representative of the Law. Everything that does not match the standards is a perversion in the eyes of the Law. Whoever is appointed as a defender of the Law (in this case the father himself, but the nobles and representatives in the narrative) holds arbitrary, unchallengeable power simply for being who they are and not because guided by reason. These lines highlight the reasons why Kafka uses performance and perversion in his legal narrative: he criticises the perverted power, showing that it needs to perform grandiosity and authority to establish itself.

The criticism cannot be expressed directly to the Law and this is why the letter went through the hands of Kafka's mother, who refused to show it to her husband. As a symbol of perverted Law, Kafka's father is unreachable. Like the countryman in *Before the Law*, Kafka could have reached the Law only if he had done something unexpected, perverted, to pass the wardens. Instead, he followed a legal, non-perverted routine by submitting his case to the "court" that approves or dismisses the cases. Kafka is re-creating the performance of a legal procedure, adding also his mother to the "court": by seeking her approval without being expected to do so, Kafka is asking for permission to communicate with the Law following the steps required by a non-perverted system and is therefore denied admittance.

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[431] Ibid.
[432] Ibid., 164.
[433] Ibid., 167.

In the parable, the wardens are a forced step to follow before accessing the Law. They are scary and powerful, but they can communicate with the pleaders. Kafka attributes a similar performance to his mother while showing the father's roles of judge and executioner not only with power of life and death, but also of success and failure:

> What was also terrible was when you ran round the table, shouting, to grab one [...] and Mother (in the end) had to rescue one, as it seemed. Once again one had, so it seemed to the child, remained alive through your mercy and bore one's life henceforth to an undeserved gift from you. This too is the place to mention the threats about the consequences of disobedience. When [...] you threatened me with the prospect of failure, my veneration for your opinion was so great that the failure then became inevitable.[434]

And just after this, to underline the role of the mother as an intermediary between the Law and the rest of the world, unworthy to be spoken to directly (my emphasis): "What was also maddening were those rebukes when one was treated as a third person [after the mother], in other words *accounted not worthy even to be spoken to angrily*".[435] Kafka is aware that he is not allowed to speak directly to his father, because he would be treated with anger, so he is looking for approval. He is performing the same chronological performance of his parable: *Before the Law* has often been interpreted in its spatial meaning, given the countryman is physically in front of the access to the Law. It is for example the case in its Italian translation *Davanti alla Legge* (which, literally translated, means "In front of the Law"). This meaning is not wrong per se, as it underlines the isolation of a subject when "firmly outside the law".[436] However, both the original word *vor* and the English translation *before* have a chronological meaning, too. The parable describes not only what is in front of the Law, but also what happens before the Law can be accessed: the pleader (Kafka) must seek the warden (his mother) 's approval.

Towards the middle of the letter, Kafka describes his and his father's relationship with Judaism and further perverts the course of the "trial" by taking the role of the judge. Judaism, at the time of writing the letter, was for Kafka an important topic: he had already written several texts influenced by the holy texts and Jewish traditions, dealt passionately with Yiddish culture via Yitzchak Löwy, an actor friend who introduced Kafka to Yiddish culture and art. The year after writing the letter, he defined himself as a Jewish lawyer, but only a few years before disregarded as ridiculous the idea of being an Austrian lawyer.[437] Although he could have found a common ground with his father in it, Kafka points out how even religion had been a reason to reproach him as a child, even if his father only possessed "[an] insignificant scrap of Judaism".[438] Kafka is now judging his father's knowledge about his own religion, accuses him explicitly of not doing enough to raise his child's interest in something that could have created a bond between the two, and of believing in a selfish version of Judaism, "the unconditional rightness of the opinions prevailing in a particular class of Jewish society, and hence actually [...] believing in yourself".[439] Kafka's father was performing all the acts required from him in a religious context in the temple. He would go through the motions of revering an authority that he recognizes above himself, like he would have liked his son to do with him. Kafka's criticism is again explicitly condemning a formal respect to something passively accepted as authority, instead of demanding

[434] Ibid., 162.
[435] Ibid. 172-173.
[436] Dimitris Vardoulakis, *The Doppelgänger* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 11.
[437] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, letter of 15th September 1920 and Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1923*, entry of 9th March 1914.
[438] Kafka, *Letter to his Father*, 192.
[439] Ibid., 202.

a reasoned and reasonable authority. The accusation shifts again to the relationship between the two: when Kafka becomes interested in Judaism and begins to know more about it than his father, "Judaism became abhorrent to [him] and Jewish writings unreadable",[440] which is quickly interpreted as his father's unconscious admittance that he would have done better to teach Judaism to his son. In these lines, we find an attack that has no equal in any other part of the letter. Elsewhere, Kafka apologizes to his father for the conclusions he is drawing, but here there is almost no apology. He respects Judaism because it makes sense to him and not because of an imposition and the father cannot tolerate it. It seems that in these lines Kafka feels confident enough to express his honest opinion and to accuse his father of selfishness, probably because the celestial Law he is more knowledgeable about precedes the father's law and gives Kafka enough power to play the role of the judge, at least in one matter.

At the end of the letter, a further perversion undermines Kafka's case. After having made his case and keeping the legal tone, Kafka takes the role of his father, who now is allowed to "speak" at the trial, and makes an objection:

> Surveying my reasoned account of the fear I have for you, you might answer: "You maintain I make things easy for myself by explaining my relation to you simply as being your fault, but I believe [...] you make things at least no more difficult for yourself [...] you repudiate guilt and responsibility; in this, then, our method is the same. But whereas I then attribute the sole guilt to you as frankly as I mean it, you are at the same time trying to be 'too clever' and 'too affectionate' and to acquit me too of all the blame.[441]

The objection goes on for a couple of pages with the same tone. For the whole time, Kafka speaks for his father, accusing the child of not taking his responsibilities in their relationship and therefore misdirecting the fictional jury. The counter-objection closes the letter:

> [...] this whole rejoinder, which can also be partly turned against you, does not originate in you but, in fact, in me. [...] Naturally things cannot in reality fit together in the way the evidence does in my letter; life is more than a Chinese puzzle. But with the correction that results from this rejoinder [...] something has yet been achieved that is so closely approximate to the truth that it may be able to reassure us both a little and make our living and our dying easier.[442]

In these lines Kafka lucidly describes the whole relationship with his father and the Law. This is the reason why his whole poetic is based on perversion: perspectives. The perspective of "fault" or "simplicity" that both parties can accuse each other of being at fault is the originator of guilt. Kafka's father was the source of guilt that Kafka brought with himself and that defines all of his characters. Both sides can accuse each other and both sides could claim to be guiltless. The difference between the two is that Kafka, being a child, was an outsider of life, educated by an imposed power because it was his father making the rules and therefore his perspective had to be considered objective. Had his father had another role in the performance of power, it would have been different: "I should have been happy to have you as a friend, as a chief, an uncle, a grandfather, even indeed [...] as a father-in-law. Only as what you are, a father, you have been too

[440] Ibid., 196.
[441] Ibid., 215.
[442] Ibid., 217.

strong for me".[443] Every other role described in these lines performs power when someone's personality is already established in life and there is a more reliable power figure to count on: a father, "the man who [is] so tremendously the measure of all things for [Kafka]".[444] In the fictional parallel with *The Judgment*, Georg is intrinsically guilty because his father determined so. His punishment is perverted because it originated from nothing more than his father's will and has no purpose. It does not matter what he is guilty of or that the "trial" he was subject to was only a list of accusations. Both Kafka and his father perceive themselves innocent and the other guilty, but the father's higher power, acquired through his birth and performance, makes Kafka/Georg guilty and worth of punishment. The son is *weggejagt*, "hounded away from the room", even if in this case the meaning is better conveyed in the Italian translation *cacciato via* (literally "hunted away"), as it shows how he was hunted and banished from the space occupied by the father. When the child is away, the father does not have an audience any longer and his performance is over. He ceases to be a godly avatar and crashes on the floor, maybe sharing the death sentence with his son.

Kafka understands that the Law is perverted, but not how, nor how to access it: by writing this letter, he tries to finally communicate with the Law in search of understanding, enter the Castle and challenge the nobles to explain the laws. Had he only managed to pass through the first gatekeeper, he may have been able to understand the performances that he could only witness as an audience member, or at least have the trial that none of his characters managed to receive. The perverted Law imposes guilt and authority by birth. Every punishment is perverted, because it is only motivated from the Law's perspective.

The next section analyses two cinematic adaptations of the most important Law-related novel: *The Trial*. The perspective of cinema directors and adapters allows for a better understanding of the perversion of the Law as a physical and visual performance.

THE TRIAL

No discussion about Kafka and his use of Law would be complete without an extensive focus on *The Trial*. The novel is not only the best description of the legal system in Kafka's world, but it is also an endless source of evidence of the influence performative arts have over the Law, as extensively discussed by Mladek.[445] His essay shows the performative character of the novel by highlighting all of the moments in which K. "suspects he is part of the show for curios spectators" and "begins to play the resisting subject and therefore unwittingly performs his role",[446] to the point that he even dies as if he was performing.

The scenario described in *The Trial* is so obviously suffocating that every time the novel is mentioned in existing sentences or trials, it is always to refer to absurd, paradoxical instances in which someone is being mistreated or not receiving proper justice, often because of loopholes in the law.[447] Here I discuss the novel as an example of the performativity of Law, with respect to how cinematographers represent *The Trial* in their adaptations. Having stressed the importance of performance in Kafka's literature and for the Law, I will now observe how performative arts approached this iconic representation of the perversion of the Law.

In a previous chapter, I have already mentioned the two most known film adaptations of *The Trial*, one directed by Orson Welles in 1962 and another in 1993 adapted by Harold Pinter and directed by David Jones. I make this choice for these specific adaptations because of their

[443] Ibid., 219.
[444] Ibid., 167.
[445] Mladek, *Radical Play*.
[446] Ibid., 225.
[447] Jonathan Blackmore, "An Examination Into the Influence of Franz Kafka on American Jurisprudence," *Journal Jurisprudence,* 4 (2009): 307-322.

opposing styles: although other adaptations are commonly discussed,[448] my impression is that critics have not paid enough attention to the value of David Jones' adaptation. Pinter and Jones try to narrate the story, as I will later point out, in a plain and literal way. They describe the events as if they could realistically happen, thus remaining faithful to the original perverted atmosphere expressed by Kafka's plain and descriptive style. As Pinter himself said "The nightmare of [Kafka's] world is precisely in its ordinariness. That is why it is so frightening and strong".[449] The other films, including Orson Welles', which probably served as a guideline for those following, opt for a hallucinatory atmosphere, with dream-like settings and events that take the story away from the realm of reality. The realism used by David Jones recreates Kafka's narrative, including the frequent use of irony and subtle comedy that allegedly brought Kafka himself to laugh while reading it to the point of being unable to continue.[450] The choices made by Welles and Jones to represent invisible powers and superior entities without ever addressing them directly, like Kafka did using a different artistic medium, are also visible in the execution of the punishment, as will become apparent. The commonalities with the novel will be pointed out in order to show how perversion and its performance are represented in this specific performative art.

When adapting a literary piece to any visual artform, the first challenge, even before deciding how much to follow the plot or depart from it, is how to visualize the events. The issue of visual portrayal of narrated events is "particularly acute in the case of an author who systematically problematizes this very relationship in his writing".[451] As discussed in chapter two, Kafka was extremely visual, but at the same time considered the use of images "a source of much anguish".[452] Because cinema offers a more direct way to portray images naturalistically, it is a perfect medium to show the vision of a visually-minded writer. Theatre translates images, too, but needs a higher number of conventions and implicit agreements with the audience. Organisational and economic reasons would make close to impossible to show on a stage, at least naturalistically, all the places Josef K. visits in *The Trial*, his whole physical and emotional journey or even a specific event like the children surrounding Josef and Titorelli at the painter's studio. Therefore, actors and directors need to acknowledge this impossibility and make choices using narration and acting techniques allowing the audience to understand what is happening on stage, even if it is not actually happening. In Battistini's adaptation of 2005, for example, the director decided to represent Titorelli's studio with one canvas and to only show one kid, while the presence of the others was only suggested with noises in the background. Specific metaphorical choices can be more or less interesting and have a different impact, but symbolism is often needed.

In cinema, literal transposition is easier. Choices are still a necessity, considering the same scene can be showed in a variety of different ways, but, should a director decide to represent the same episode literally, it would be much more straightforward. In both adaptation discussed below, Titorelli's scene is showed faithfully in a crammed space surrounded by female actors who laugh and shout at the two characters while quick editing and details of their mouth and eyes raise the pace. There are different choices about the use of angles, editing, sounds and pace, but the scene is more realistic and does not require the audience to make an effort of imagination or to understand any symbolism. The use of technical and narrative metaphors and symbolism in cinema is mostly a directorial choice, used to stress a particular event,[453] not a need.

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[448] See *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, 229, in which Harold Mantell's (1973) and David Thomas' (1988) adaptations are mentioned as two of the most educational.

[449] Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter*, 88.

[450] Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, 178.

[451] Preece, *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, 227.

[452] Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, letter dated 6/12/1912.

[453] Although this has been vastly discussed and proved, to the point that this is essentially treated as a fact in cinema criticism, the narrative effect of camera use is further stressed in David Bordwell, *Narration in Fiction Film* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

Film adaptations of Kafka's stories started in 1950 with the Cuban short film *Una confusion cotidiana* (Néstor Almendros, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea), an adaptation of *A common Confusion* and there have been dozens since then, produced everywhere in the world. A new film adaptation of *The Trial* directed by John Williams is planned to open in 2018. Apart from the two adaptations of *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis* that I focus on in this thesis, particularly worth mentioning are Straub-Huillet *Class Relations* (1984), an adaptation of *Amerika* with a fragmentary and non-naturalistic style that seems to isolate characters and audience (a style that Straub brought to an extreme in 2011, directing the short film *Jackals and Arabs* that becomes a recitation of the text with barely any use of imagery and cinematic techniques), and Haneke's faithful adaptation for TV of *The Castle* (1997). Most of these films are adaptations of (or at least inspired by) *The Metamorphosis, The Trial, The Castle, A Country Doctor* and *In The Penal Colony* and the vast majority are short films. This is not related to the fact that most of these stories are short, as proved by the few feature films using the same stories. It is more likely due to the difficulty of representing Kafka's perverted atmospheres. Kafka's intricate stories demand directors and actors to make difficult choices and offer several challenges. "In adapting Kafka [directors] function as *metteurs-en-scene*, either presenting a reading they believe has been insufficiently recognised [...] or to introduce a new audience to the text".[454] Both solutions need to remain consistent with the perverted style, but present different challenges: in the first case (for example with the visual exaggerations of Welles' *The Trial* and the minimalistic representation of Straub-Huillet's *Class Relations*) to represent the directors' "political intentions" (ibid.) while remaining consistent with Kafka's narration and in the second (Jones' *The Trial* and Haneke's *The Castle*) to present the original material as it is. Below, I discuss three scenes that most clearly show the perversion of Justice from the eyes of Welles' and Jones' adaptations of *The Trial*: the opening, the narration of *Before the Law* and the end of the films.

Harold Pinter wrote the adaptation directed by David Jones and decided for a faithful, naturalistic representation in a classical style. Therefore, Jones opens in a classic fashion, setting the mood of the film with the first shots: the opening credits appear over a few establishing shots of the city in the morning, in which we see people performing everyday activities. Nothing seems unusual for the viewer and the camera pans upwards and zooms towards a balcony before cutting to the interior of the apartment, continuing its left pan and showing Josef K. asleep in his bed. Another standard cut and he wakes up suddenly, looks outside the window and sees someone looking at him from the neighbouring building. His surprised reaction to the presence of an audience looking at him while he wakes up is the first suggestion that something of his routine has been perverted. The events that are about to happen are a performance and therefore an audience is needed. Immediately after, Josef turns towards the door, and rings for Frau Grubach in what seems a habitual routine, but, instead of her, two men enter the room, confirming that his routine has been perverted. The soundtrack follows the same pattern: a relaxed, quiet theme plays for the whole opening, accompanying the routine of the characters showed with the credits. The volume lowers once Josef sees the audience member and then disappears as soon as the perversion of the routine is confirmed.

Welles' beginning of the film shows how much adaptations into visual arts are needed to fully explore the potential of Kafka's performance of perversion. Instead of establishing the place and character, "Orson Welles makes no pretence of great respect for Kafka's work"[455] and opens the film with the narration of the parable *Before the Law*, thus giving it the same role and importance that the arrest has in the novel. *Before the Law* is defined as a parable because it contains profound concepts in simple language and images. The position of the parable in the

[454] Brady Hughes, '*The Essential is Sufficient,: the Kafka Adaptations of Orson Welles, Straub-Huillet and Michael Haneke*, in *Mediamorphosis*, 185.

[455] Lev, *Three Adaptations of 'The Trial'*, 182.

film suggests to the audience that the key to interpreting the film is in those lines, even if we do not yet know why.[456] The parable is narrated by the director, who is the highest authority in the making of a film, like the Law the parable is talking about. Being the simple explanation of a high concept represented by a perverted Law dominating the characters, the contrast between the parable and the rest of the film needs to be as strong and evident as possible. The use of drawings and still slides is in contrast with the rest of the movie, highlighting the importance of the segment. At the same time, the style reminds us that we cannot fully grasp the law, like children and primitive people cannot fully grasp the world they are trying to represent with a similar style. The parable is referred to again before the final scene of the film. Josef is in the church, talking to the prison chaplain, who, in the novel, narrates the parable. In this adaptation, Huld, Josef's lawyer, interrupts the dialogue and replaces the priest in the narration. In Welles' film villains and positive characters are easily identifiable, unlike in Kafka's original novel, and Huld is portrayed as the central villain. Occasionally, his performance is almost parodic and ironic, with glances at the camera to show the audience he is not as sick as he is pretending to be, or smoke and light effects to give him a gloomy look. As a "master of the dark, decrepit labyrinth",[457] a faithful representative of the Law, he is at least partially responsible for what has been happening and "his confrontation with Josef K is the culmination of the lesson".[458] His responsibility is even more symbolic because he is played by the film director: the fusion between his diegetic and extra-diegetic performances proves that everything that has happened until then had been orchestrated by him. Huld's appearance at the end (surprisingly healthy, capable of walking and not covered in smoke) has a similar purpose as that of stereotypical action film villains: explain the masterplan. The parable the audience heard at the beginning of the film makes sense now, when the film has happened, and Josef's line "I've heard it. We've all heard it" suggests that Josef is part of the audience and therefore his story is the audience's story. Welles has broken the fourth wall and reminds the audience that the perversion of Law described in the film is real: the hallucinatory events, from big spaces contained in small buildings, never-ending mazes and people appearing from apparently nowhere, are symbols of the perverted reality. However, these directorial choices also suggest that Huld does not have access to the "evil plan" that motivated the whole film. He is external to it like Josef and the audience. He (both as Welles and Huld) puts Josef in front of the drawing representing the entrance to the law and illuminates him only with the light of the projector. What Josef has been looking for during the whole movie is useless, because it only represents something inaccessible, maybe even unreal. Only visual media like cinema or theatre could represent in a single image Kafka's perverted Law as something existing on a different level than real people and created by those who claim to represent it.

After revealing the illusory nature of the Law, Huld tries to convince Josef to claim he was crazy. After all, he claims, attempting to defy the court is "a mad gesture" and claiming to have been persecuted is "a sign of lunacy". By admitting to be crazy, Josef would be re-instated in the system of the Law. If he refused to admit to be crazy, he would immediately be found guilty and this would be crazy. With this paradox, Welles shows Kafka's point on perspectives: whoever follows the standards of the Law is considered sane simply because is not questioning established traditions, but whoever perverts them deserves a punishment, regardless of their motivation or real behaviour. K.'s refusal to accept what the court wants is the major difference between Welles' and Jones' representation of the mechanics of the Law: Welles' Josef understands the fiction surrounding him, and becomes a threat that could be dangerous for the system.[459] He must be either normalized again or killed immediately. On the contrary, Jones' Josef, matching Kafka's original character, is never a threat. As the priest explains at the end of

[456] Henry Sussman, *The Trial: Kafka's Unholy Trinity* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1993).
[457] David Thomson, *Rosebud* (New York: Borzoi Book, 1996).
[458] Ibid.
[459] Slavoj Zizek, "Ideology Between Fiction and Fantasy," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1, no.1(1996): 15-32.

the parable, "to doubt [the worth of the position given by the law] would be to doubt the law". Because of his doubts, Josef doesn't belong in the machinery of the Law and therefore, as a mere consequence, has to be executed.

This is the most obvious instance in which "the divergences between film and novel are most interesting [...] where Welles and Kafka would seem to have something in common".[460] Welles realizes the perversion of Law and translates Kafka's vision expressed through words into with direct, straightforward images. The following dialogue about accepting an insanity plea is equally direct and motivated. Law is perverted for an external viewer because there is no expectation of justice, but only a superficial performance. However, within the standards decided by this Law, the perversion is the claim to be innocent. In fact, if Josef accepted his guilt, he would remain within the parameters of the Law and receive no punishment. As it usually happens with confessions,[461] he would become guilty for everyone, including himself, but he would not be questioning the performance he has been assigned by the Law. To perform the role of a guilty person without perverting the standard of guiltiness decided by the Law means, as explained to him in another scene, to not suffer a real punishment, but only go through the performance of endless vicious circles in pointless attempts to be proved innocent, like the other condemned men. By claiming to be innocent, he is guilty of perverting the standards of the Law and therefore receives the only possible punishment.

Like in the rest of the film, David Jones goes for a more literal representation of the event leading to the narration of the parable. However, what is interesting to notice here is the choice for the actor to play the priest. Anthony Hopkins is not only the most recognizable actor in the cast, but it is also the only one whose iconic previous roles are used as a narrative choice. The same was one of the reasons leading to Welles' choice to give the role of Josef K. to Anthony Perkins. Only two years before the film came out, Anthony Hopkins had become one of the most feared villains in the history of cinema with his interpretation of Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* (J. Demme, 1991). Using this immediate visual reference, Jones makes the audience doubt the intentions of the character and suggests that he may be a hidden danger. Even in this case, a visual medium proves itself effective in translating Kafka's subtext. The effectiveness of the image is even clearer when compared to Welles' priest, whose kindness and trustworthiness make him a forgettable and essentially replaceable character.

Confident that his audience would have thought of Hannibal Lecter while watching the film, Jones keeps mirroring the close-ups of *The Silence of the Lambs*, as well as the facial expressions and the gazes of the character. In his reaction cuts, the priest is silent, stares at Josef and finally explodes in a scary shout. Hopkins also moves and stares like his previous character and all of this helps suggesting that the priest is more dangerous than he looks like. Hannibal Lecter appears calm and kind at all times, relying on superior physical and intellectual skills to overpower his victims, while the priest relies on the power given to him by the Law. The lights in this section of the film are dim and illuminate him from the bottom light and accentuate shadows and eyes, further contributing to the suggestion of imminent danger. It is almost as if David Jones was showing us where Hannibal Lecter had been hiding and, as a deviated human being, is now part of the only legal system that could hire a highly educated and subtle criminal: a perverted legal system.

With the parable, the priest is giving us and Josef a key to solve the enigma posed by the whole story. While Anthony Hopkins narrates the parable, we still have the feeling of imminent danger. The monologue is barely interrupted by reaction cuts before Josef and the priest start moving while the rest of the parable is told in a long cut and the priest holds his eyes on Josef, studying his reactions. In one of the few changes from the novel, the priest immediately turns his back to Josef and leaves, barely discussing about the meaning, suggesting that his task is now over.

[460] Naremore, *The Magic World of Orson Welles*, 214.
[461] Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law & Literature* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2000).

Josef tries to stop him and talk, but the priest sums up the meaning of the story, and therefore the Law saying "The scripture is unalterable". When adapting the story for the camera, Pinter and Jones had to sum up Kafka's message and their choice to use that sentence shows their understanding, before literary criticism, that the unchangeable standards of the Law are the real perversion of the story.

In the original, Josef K. receives in his house the visit of two men who have been sent to execute him on his thirty-first birthday. At first he thinks they are cheap actors, again stressing how the display of power of the Law is a performance, but then follows them outside, resists feebly, but soon gives up and walks with them to the place of his execution. Once there, they undress him and start a weird routine by giving each other the knife for the execution in the hope to make Josef take it and stab himself. However, Josef does not do so and eventually the two kill him "Like a dog!", as Josef himself says, "as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him".[462]

The perversion of the punishment is showed in the two films in different ways. Pinter and Jones remain faithful to the representation of a dramatic performance described in the novel.[463] To capture the last moments, the streets are barely lit and almost empty and the music is slow and ominous, with the occasional sound of a bell in the background to underline K.'s approach to death. Jones uses some of the actors we have seen in the film as passers-by, but they are not showed clearly, so the spectator, like Josef, is unsure if it is actually them. They are the audience of the parade towards the last act of his performance and, like spectators, they are not allowed to interact with him. To underline the performative character of the situation, Kafka keeps repeating that the two look like cheap actors or opera singers, but Jones, relying on a visual medium, highlights their contrasting size and ages, turning them into a couple of clowns. At the end of the scene, we are left watching K.'s lifeless body before the camera pans up and the final credits start scrolling in front of a stone wall. A reminder of the destiny of whoever goes against something bigger and stronger than them.

Orson Welles' adaptation keeps only some of the main elements. Josef has just refused to confess his guilt and is walking alone in the excessively huge square in front of the building. Walking towards the camera, he becomes bigger, but the space around him is immense and desolate, underlining his loneliness. Once Josef gets closer, he stops, looks up towards the camera, as if he had had a revelation. However, the reverse shot shows he was looking at a gate on top of some steps and the two men coming out of it. In this version, K. does not oppose any resistance and is brought around the city, surrounded by vast spaces and huge buildings. The shadows are much bigger than they would realistically be and the only diegetic sound is that of the steps. Everything is bigger, louder and more overwhelming than it would be naturalistically, highlighting the perverted environment, rather than its performative style. The most significant and noteworthy change happens at the end of the walking sequence. Behaving like the buffoons Kafka describes them to be, the two thugs throw K. into a pit and seem unsure about what to do. K. starts preparing his own costume for the execution and undresses himself before they clumsily get into the pit.

Welles stresses the perversion of the punishment through the acceptance of the punishment itself and highlights how the whole is a performance by showing the two executioners as clowns and K. as an actor getting ready for his performance. K. undresses himself and lays down on the rocks, making himself the sacrificial victim the original Josef did not want to be. The two thugs stand still even when Josef could easily escape, as they are aware that the performance of the Law has been accepted and won't be stopped now. The performance is only apparently accepted, though: Welles criticized Kafka's choice to show Josef as a victim who collaborates with his executioners, claiming that "Kafka would have never put [this ending] after

[462] Kafka, *The Trial*, 213.
[463] Raymond Armstrong, *Kafka and Pinter: Shadow-Boxing* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

the death of six million Jews"[464] and, in a turn of events, Josef is laid down, but instead of passively waiting for the executioners to be done with their tedious act of passing each other the knife in the hope that he will kill himself, he looks at them and defiantly says: "You expect me to take the knife and do the job myself? No, you'll have to do it". Belittled by this confidence, the executioners stand up, hold hands to give each other courage and leave the pit barely looking at Josef, who is now confident, looks at them with a challenging look and keeps repeating "You! You'll have to kill me!", until the words become a shout and a maniacal laughter. Josef looks at the two men from the bottom of the hole, in the same camera angle used on several occasions during the film to underline his smallness when compared to everything around him. However, this time he shouts, laughs and challenges the power above him. From the top of the pit, the executioners lit up a stick of dynamite and throw it next to Josef, who, still laughing, picks it up and moves as if to throw it away. The camera, though, cuts back to the executioners, who are far from the pit when the explosive goes off, leaving the audience wondering if Josef got rid of the dynamite and saved himself or not.

The end of the film marks the final change of the character: he started "having all the respect for officialdom that his accusers could desire. He arranges his life methodically, he cowers before his boss, and he acts like a martinet to underlings in his office"[465] and, after struggling to compete with the Law, is now comfortable and happy to defy it and refuse its decision of killing him. If he was actually killed or not is irrelevant: what matters is his decision to disrespect the sentence. The perversion of Law has perverted the man to the point of making him the opposite of himself and a part of the world he has been rejecting for the whole film. In this instance, the punishment he was expecting made him stronger and gave him the power that is usually given to strong characters by weaker characters in Kafka's narrative.

Even two adaptations that stand at each other's polar opposites in terms of faithfulness to the text acknowledge that Kafka's Law depends on performances and perverts justice and punishment. Although completely different, the two styles show the how Kafka's style requires a visual representation to portray the performance of a perverted Law. Thanks to its visual nature, cinema is an ideal medium to represent the nature of Kafka's Law as a constant presence.[466] Kafka's stories can be used as a script to follow word by word or as a starting point to deviate from or a mix of the two. However, the narrative structure needs to use perversions and acknowledge their performative role, otherwise the film would lack its fundamental tone portraying it as "Kafkaesque".[467]

Kafka's perversions are a constant performance. Although literary criticism so far has acknowledged, and tried to explain, some specific events and the visual nature of Kafka's language, there is no consensus about the importance of visual arts and Kafka's literature. Some adaptations have been occasionally commented, but there has never been so far a recognition of the potential that these arts have to express Kafka's language. The power and behaviour of Kafka's Law has been discussed for decades, but in this chapter I have showed how its representatives depend on performances to establish their power. Furthermore, I have maintained that Law is corrupted by individuals who perversely receive power through no merit other than a birth right and the performative effects of punishment are reduced to a means to dominate over victims. Kafka's work brings all of this to a perversion, as Law becomes

[464] "Orson Welles Interview," in *Cahiers du cinema* 165 (1965), reprinted in Welles, *The trial: a Film*, 9.

[465] Naremore, *The Magic World*, 228

[466] Discussing in detail the semantic use of objects made by Kafka would go outside of the purpose of this thesis, but a deep analysis on the subject can be found in David Herman, *Universal Grammar and Narrative Form* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

[467] Although this term has been abundantly used to the point of losing value, I am using it here, specifically when referred to film adaptations, in agreement with Troscianko's interpretation of "Kafkaesque" language as a highly visual language that needs, in ordered to be represented, action and no linear narrative. See Emily Troscianko, "Kafkaesque worlds in real time," *Language and Literature* 19, no.2 (2010): 151-171.

unquestionable and the only possible punishment is death. Being performative by nature, we must acknowledge the strong link between Kafka's perverted Law and visual arts. Only performances can fully portray the extent of the perversion through immediate images and subtle references, like the slideshow of Welles' *Before the Law* or Jones' use of an actor whose previous perverted character allows the audience to instinctively feel the true nature of the Law.

CONCLUSION

Before starting my research for this thesis, my understanding of Kafka came mostly from Italian translations and critical literature, both of which focus on the darker sides of Kafka's work and stress how his literature reveals a highly-educated person with a gloomy view of the world and intricated ways to express grotesque horror and despair. One criticism I received about my previous work, although it was studying the relationship between Kafka, cinema and theatre, was that I had not explicitly mentioned that Kafka was clinically depressed. I refused to attempt an analysis of the person, but I started this work with that approach in the back of my mind and ready to do what critics like Roberto Calasso and Claudia Sonino had suggested: start my approach to Kafka with the knowledge that he is the quintessential author symbolizing of despair, vicious circles and pointless peregrination, expressed with refined language. On a superficial, and sometimes not so superficial, level, Kafka's writing may appear just like that. However, once I left the Italian translations of primary and secondary literature, the picture became much bigger and more complex. Without denying the beauty of Kafka's language or the several suffocating feelings evoked by his stories, the desperate, allegedly depressed writer became a person with different sides, several interests, an ironic, some would say twisted, sense of humour and, above all, a unique view of his world and society that shows him to be more contemporary than it could seem at first blush. Although there is the perception that everything has been said about Kafka's literature, I contend that his works speak productively to our historical period, too. To understand the message coming from the narrative of perversion, the previous pages have described that view *from* Kafka and not *of* Kafka.

In the introduction to this work, I referred to Kafka's literature as that of the periphery. His literature suggests the necessity to shift our observations from a "centre" that sees the outside as a perverted, different reality, to the periphery, a perspective that understands the so-called normal as a performance. As discussed in Kafka's biography, the act of stepping aside to observe the world from a distance was essentially literal every time Kafka went to sanatoria, where he could breathe freely, something he couldn't do, according to what he wrote to Felice, when he went to cities and zoos, places of observation, congregation and segregation of humans and animals. To determine a change of perspective without a judgment, I have used the term "perversion", because it implies something that is connected with what it is perverting, but deviates from expectations. Furthermore, observers of perversions perceive them as unexpected, voyeuristically fascinating phenomena, that at the same time have to be kept at a distance and controlled, even drastically, by the same authority that establishes standards. I have also used the term "performance" as a conscious or unconscious display of a skill of reproduced reality for a limited time and with an audience on which to have its performative effect.

From his perspective, Kafka can only observe social standards and from here he realizes how they resemble performances imposed by a higher authority. However, because those who are part of the standard do not realize its performance, in his stories he perverts the assumptions taken for granted by society and makes them a new standard. Kafka makes his point by either exaggerating the performances of the expected standards and creating perversions, like Herr Bendemann's grandiose behaviour and inexplicable authority in *The Judgment*, or by showing how perverted events force the reconsideration of standards, but do not change the nature of the individual, unless the audience uses their standpoint to reject the initial event, as does Gregor Samsa's family after the transformation in *The Metamorphosis*. As a result, in the first scenario, the reader understands the perversion, but his characters accept it, just as socially integrated individuals accept expected performances and behave accordingly. In the second scenario, the individual perversion is treated as a foreign element trying to disrupt the harmony of a balanced system: there is no surprise for the event itself, regardless of its impossibility, but the balance needs to be restored and the perversion eliminated.

So far, Kafka commentators have often described the author as an outsider, who did not feel he could belong to anything. While agreeing with the observation, I maintain that Kafka's literature goes beyond that, as it gives a reason why he is excluded by showing the social tendency to categorize and divide itself into specific identities. Once the identities are defined, those in power establish and regulate a series of standards and performances needed to belong to a certain identity. Furthermore, the identities are always observed from one perspective, which becomes the expected term of comparison: in this work I have shown the male/female, human/animal and legal/illegal duality, but I have also referred to other, such as gentile/Jew and healthy/sick. It is possible to point out more identities and dualistic choices, but the key point is that one of the two terms determines the standard to adhere to, while the second is a lack of the first. With this work I have shown how Kafka pre-dated the post-structuralist discourse well before Derrida and Deleuze. Kafka's work differs from later, post-structuralist criticism of structures and binary oppositions, because his style describes, but does not judge. The perversion of standards, or structures, is usually destroyed by a cold power in an attempt to remain static, reflecting the social fear of what is new. Contrary to the pessimistic message that previous critics have suggested, according to which the unfair law is immutable, I have suggested in the previous pages that Kafka leaves readers with the suggestion that small changes, the foundation of every form of evolution, can happen through perversions. At the end of *The Metamorphosis*, the old and the young generations survive and live in harmony with each other thanks to the perversion that happened to the generation in between and that has been eradicated. However, the younger generation, represented by Greta, is not a reflection of the old one, being stronger and more independent than she was at the beginning of the story, while still enacting some of the performances of the old generation, like the acceptance to get married when the parents want her to do so. This development suggests that the new standards will probably continue to resist perversions, as they are still regulated by Law, but slowly get closer to what previous standards considered perverted, thus shifting the "central" and "peripheral" perspectives.

If specific standards can change to the point of becoming what was previously understood as a perversion, the same cannot be said about the need for standards and performative acts that determine identification, and this is where it can be said that Kafka foreshadowed a post-structuralist perspective . Taking gender as a key example, as I do especially in chapter two, the modernity of Kafka's perspective is confirmed in a key point made decades later in queer studies by Jagose and Butler, who, commenting on the non-existence of one gender, maintained that homosexuality, bisexuality and every possible categorization are equally a social superimposition, a "construction of discrete sexual 'natures' that require and institute their opposites through exclusion".[468] As Friedländer maintains, Kafka's issues in life have a sexual nature and in chapters 2 and 3 I have further confirmed how his literature derives from his life and the Oedipal fight is lost by Kafka, who fails to identify himself with the concept of masculinity. As a consequence, Kafka's gender-bending alter-egos are born. If gender can be bent because it is a performance, every other socially accepted performance can be equally bent and new identities and behaviours are possible through perversion. We can therefore draw two conclusions: Kafka's perversions stem from queerness, as he shows that perverted individuals are possible in a world dominated by heteronormative standards. Secondly, by showing how standards of all kinds are performances imposed by a higher system that punishes before explaining the crime, Kafka draws attention to their rigidity and cruelty, given that there is no real option between standard and perversion, given how a perverted choice would lead to exclusion or death.

Adding to previous literature, I have maintained that the capital punishment of the Law is a consequence of perversion and is manipulated by the few with power who can also understand the Law. I have also shown that the Law demands performances both to be enforced

[468] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 69.

and to be respected. Building from what I show in chapter four about the duality animal/human as equivalent to free/prisoner, I have shown that the main performance of the Law is as a depriver of freedom with its very existence by creating standards and, with them, perversions through performance. In fact, freedom is the state in which Red Peter is born, but it is the performativity of the Law that encages him. In essence, what the Law considers a perverted state is seldom acquired and mostly innate or caused subconsciously, but only performances can rectify this state. The prisoner of *In the Penal Colony* is unaware of his guilt and can only be cleansed by performing his death, Gregor Samsa does not consciously choose to become vermin, but if he had continued to perform as the obedient breadwinner he was supposed to be, or if he had kept trying to speak as an insect, he may not have died. To sum up, performances are an invaluable concept in the work of Kafka, even when discussing something like Law, that has so far been seen as the starting point of his narrative. Future critical literature may profit from using it as a starting point for critical analysis.

Kafkian performance and the use of queerness are not only useful to literary and gender studies. Cinema and theatre also owe Kafka a debt of gratitude: his perverted stories have inspired several films and theatrical works. Not only the atmosphere of several films has been described "Kafkaesque", maybe to the point of depriving this word of its original effectiveness, but films like *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986) with its fusion of animal and human, *Zelig* (Woody Allen, 1983), whose title character is a constant performer crossing boundaries and defying expectations, and the anthropomorphic animals living unnoticed in a dream-like world of *Inland Empire* (David Lynch, 2008) are reminiscent of Kafka's crossing and fusion of borders between dualities that challenge accepted standards. The extent of this influence is a topic that deserves further consideration and that critics of performance cannot ignore.

With the introduction of the idea of perversion as a neutral, non-sexual concept that has no intrinsic negative values, but opposes social standards and its performance, there is now one more lens through which it is possible to analyse Kafka's artistic creation, adding a layer to the critical literature. More specifically, the predominance of these two elements in Kafka's literature allows space for further research in different fields. More perversions are present, as Orson Welles understood by perverting space in his adaptation of *The Trial*. As space and time are connected, as we know thanks to the theory of relativity, the perversion of time is also a potential topic. The novel *Amerika* comes to mind as a perfect example, with its constant lapses of time depending on the protagonist's state, as if he was the centre of gravity, which reminds us of the importance of subjectivity and perspective in perversion. With this work I also show Kafka's take on topics like gender, animal treatment and legal approaches, which have evolved significantly in the last century and, partially, in the direction of what was perceived as a perversion in Kafka's time. As I mentioned in chapter five as an example, Kafka is often mentioned in legal texts and sentences to comment on situations perceived as absurd or grotesque. Sociological studies may be interested to explore how much Kafka's literature has contributed to the evolution of different cultures and societies, particularly in areas where his literature is better known. Finally, from the perspective of performance studies, it is possible to suggest that there can be new specific approaches to adapt Kafka's stories. In drama schools, Brecht and Shakespeare are already treated differently from most of other authors when it comes to the acting style, given their language and themes. Once adapters, directors and performers start reading Kafka's stories from the lens of perversion, the need to stress its performance through an explicit performance may lead to different acting or directing styles that highlight the perspective of an observer who found himself on the rejected side of society and shown its unfairness, but also its artificial standards.

Finally, from a social perspective, it may seem anachronistic to discuss Kafka under the lens of perversion and performance in this day and age, when several sociologists and philosophers have already acknowledged what I claim Kafka suggested before them. As perversion is often relegated to the sexual realm, it is only in recent times that a complex concept

such as perversion has lost its negative connotation. The academic field of sexuality studies has contested the historical connotation of the term perversion. As mentioned in the first chapter, the term has been used to refer to pathologies and unsocial behaviour, it is now reclaimed as a neutral term by those parts of society who demand not to be categorized or marginalized by society because of their sexual (or a-sexual) behaviour. We live in a historical period in which new technologies and methods of communication are establishing new ways to travel, opening the virtual borders and putting in contact cultures that were barely known, if at all, to each other. Marginalization of minorities and perversions is a phenomenon that never ceased and has always brought dire consequences for those on the periphery, but when technology and desperation permitted, it reached its apex with the horrors of fascist Europe. Kafka did not see the Second World War, but his stories are deeply concerned with the suppression of difference, older generations ready to kill their children to keep traditions and values whose origins may be unknown to them. He portrays performances enacted out of habit and defended by all those in power. Kafka essentially speaks of ignorance and fear establishing the standards and eliminating the perversion. Contrary to some critics, I do not see any premonition of the massacre of the Jews in Kafka, but a description of the current reality Kafka was living in, made of dualities and exclusions, that eventually culminated in one of the biggest tragedies we know so far. In a social climate in which the fear of new cultural exchanges dominates in the highest offices in the world, who represent a population afraid of losing identity and traditions, Kafka's narrative is utterly contemporary. His narrative speaks directly to audiences who are invited to acknowledge that they are witnessing absurd performances based on standards that deprive those who do not perform them of humanity and the right to live. Kafka shows how genders are performed and how they could be performed, indirectly implying that we do not need gender as a standard at all. He shows how animals and humans perform and how similar they are, implying that humans are not the standard that needs to normalize the perversion. Above all, he shows the world from the perspective of the marginalized, the perverted, who are excluded from the performance of "normality", but they are invested with feelings, identities and motives and are sites of identification for Kafka's readers and interpreters.

An analysis of Kafka's perverted performances offers a new literary and critical view on one of the most representative authors of the 20th century, spreading a new light on his influence over theatre and cinema. At the same time, the concept of the performance of perversion offers new perspectives on social behaviour, reminding the reader to think critically about every standard, assumption and belief that he or she may be taking for granted.

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