

KAFKA AND MYTH.

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Once in a while we might read an article about Franz Kafka's relation to science. This might be an essential subject for those interested in his life and works, since it is generally supposed that Kafka's work is an emblematic picture of Western society's transformation into a modern one.

When writing about literature, it is almost impossible to avoid dealing with **myths** contemporary to the works that are on the subject. No literary text emerges without the author dealing with contemporary values, concepts, and power structures.

Part of the common myth in any society is: **science**.

Science

Kafka was ambivalent in his relation to science. On the one hand, he was a born skeptic, but on the other hand, Kafka was mesmerized in an almost childlike manner by the new technology of Modernism, and perhaps he did not realize in the same way as Nietzsche did the dangers of this technology. Nietzsche clarifies the human situation in modernity, how Man replaced God with technology and with science, progress and Liberalism. It has, for N., thus come a "revaluation of all values"... People in the West after Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, and Marx may be seen as spiritually lost, as Maurice Blanchot – one of the rare real fervent epigones to Kafka – later formulates it. F. Kafka, however, did not react quite like Nietzsche. He reacted more "unphilosophical." We might ourselves acknowledge how these texts, through their "sympathetic-antipathetic" approach, depicts the attitude of modern ambivalence. In the novels, one might find critiques of civilization, for instance in *The Trial* and the *Amerika*. In *Amerika* – a Dickens' pastiche, according to F.K. himself –, it is in the details that this is most appalling.

Kafka had a particular flair for movies. Movies are a subset within the technique. Movies, of course, has nothing to do with art but a lot with technique.

Every technical device – like a door, a telephone, a tram wagon, a telegraph, an airplane, a steamboat – were all technical miracles to Kafka, and he had almost a

religious fascination for these things. Nevertheless, there were many things about science that he did not embrace at all. Kafka was not impressed by doctors. He was struck by tuberculosis but always claimed that there was just one human disease and that this was a spiritual one. The one representative for science that Kafka took a shot at was the expert.

In novels and drafts to short stories often – in the shape of the myth – appears scientists, capitalists, geologists, historians, doctors, and explorers and travel writers. Kafka ridicules all these people. They almost always fail, and FK pictures them as failed authorities. Authorities are creating mythological chaos. Kafka contrasts chaos in mythology by order of literary form.

Kafka is an expert in putting in question authorities.

Romantic and Modernist fiction generally displays a strong and effective underlying layer beneath the manifest content. There is a myth under the explicit surface, serving as a contrast and a mediator of meaning. By putting a myth as a background, counter-voice – we might like a reader with the hero judge the myth, and we are thus also able to evaluate the hero through the myth.

Myths are historical system of ideas or ways of expression, and they might be conservative as well as revolting against the status quo. Myths are however dependant on the social situation of society and the political power structure. Myths originate from tensions in society.

Romanticism had a flair for the *Märchen*, the romantic tale. This *Märchen* generally does not stand in opposition to the actual ruling power, to society, the King, or another ruler. The *Märchen* generally is in contact with a general divine power of unknown origin, to which it is subordinate.

Roger Caillois:

"Romanticism found itself essentially incapable of producing myths. Of course, it produced tales and ghost stories willingly and lured itself into the fantastic. In doing so, however, they more and more severed themselves from the myth."

Modernism transcends Romanticism in that it abandoned the exotic in search of the heart of Power, and Modernism created a myth in the midst of the contemporary, commonplace: in the middle of the new world, in the modern super-capital.

Myth in Romanticism concentrates almost entirely upon the relation to the Unknown. Furthermore, a lot of Romanticism's success is its understanding of how to soothe the public's mind with the preoccupation of manners to deal with fear.

As an example of a famous Gothic Romantic novel, we might cite Victor Hugo. The following excerpt shows genuine Gothic Horror drama, which probably entirely fell short of compliments on Kafka's part. Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame de Paris* 1831. On Quasimodo, the hunchback himself:

"The presence of this extraordinary being caused, as it were, a breath of life to circulate throughout the entire cathedral. It seemed as though there escaped from him, at least according to the growing superstitions of the crowd, a mysterious emanation which animated all the stones of Notre-Dame, and made the deep bowels of the ancient church to palpitate. It sufficed for people to know that he was there, to make them believe that they beheld the thousand statues of the galleries and the fronts in motion. And the cathedral did indeed

seem a docile and obedient creature beneath his hand; it waited on his will to raise its great voice; it was possessed and filled with Quasimodo, as with a familiar spirit. One would have said that he made the immense edifice breathe. He was everywhere about it; in fact, he multiplied himself on all points of the structure. Now one perceived with affright at the very top of one of the towers, a fantastic dwarf climbing, writhing, crawling on all fours, descending outside above the abyss, leaping from projection to projection, and going to ransack the belly of some sculptured gorgon; it was Quasimodo dislodging the crows. Again, in some obscure corner of the church one came in contact with a sort of living chimera, crouching and scowling; it was Quasimodo engaged in thought. Sometimes one caught sight, upon a bell tower, of an enormous head and a bundle of disordered limbs swinging furiously at the end of a rope; it was Quasimodo ringing vespers or

the Angelus. Often at night a hideous form was seen wandering along the frail balustrade of carved lacework, which crowns the towers and borders the circumference of the apse; again it was the hunchback of Notre-Dame. Then, said the women of the neighborhood, the whole church took on something fantastic, supernatural, horrible; eyes and mouths were opened, here and there; one heard the dogs, the monsters, and the gargoyles of stone, which keep watch night and day, with outstretched neck and open jaws, around the monstrous cathedral, barking. And, if it was a Christmas Eve, while the great bell, which seemed to emit the death rattle, summoned the faithful to the midnight mass, such an air was spread over the sombre façade that one would have declared that the grand portal was devouring the throng, and that the rose window was watching it. And all this came from Quasimodo. Egypt would have taken him for the god of this temple; the Middle Ages believed him to be its demon: he was in fact its soul."

(V. Hugo, *NddP*, Livre IV, chap.III..)

One might think that such a prolific symbolism and Hugo's attempts to create a feeling by adding spooky

details and quantifying these, and not by subtlety and layers, was dissatisfactory to highly sensitive Franz. Kafka very early realized that the shallowness, overload, and desperation of Romantic prose in general in the novel of Hugo are apparent. Romanticism was in the form of the Gothic novel, quite abhorrent to Kafka. In Hugo's *Quasimodo*, the search for love is a prominent theme. Love, as salvation, is non-existent by Kafka. The short story *The Country Doctor* is an exception. Romanticism was, to sum up, in the form that openly referred to mysticism, foreign to Kafka. Nevertheless, in its covert and subtle forms, he loved.

In the journal *Atheneum*, - which we already have discussed, concerning irony - which was published around the millennium shift of 1800, foreboding the magnificent Hegel and his *Phänomenologie*, Fr. Schlegel's pen is glowing from enthusiasm in the new ideas, and the new landscape that is opened up by the Romantic Philosophers is inspiring to those who want to indulge into poetics. Romanticism is in part Poetics itself. Schlegel claims that contemporary poetry in Preussen does not have any mythology and that it is, in essence, a mythology that makes poetry work. Schlegel - whose kin several centuries back had many a learned priest and professor - says the old folk's had mythology. He is aware that, in his own country, they cannot possibly muster a gang of old Greek gods and stuff them up as a myth background or sub-code. However, he sees it as necessary to have a layer like that, to be able to reach the goal of Romantic Poetry. This goal is quite another one from the classical goal because Romanticism above all wanted the effect of *Das Schweben*. Schlegel then directs his mind to the new mythology, which he thinks is the soul's mythology. The human soul.

Even modern Romantic writers in the U.S.A. would vividly agree with Fr. Schlegel on this. For instance, the

prolific authors of the Atlanta-school, like Truman Capote, Harper Lee, and McCullers, know that it is essential to have a resonance in myth to reach the layers of dream hallucination where meaning is born. Without alluding to the secret symbols of the age, the mythology, all epic is empty. One might call this mythology or something else.

Around the year 1800, it was hard for the Romantics to set mythology for the entire human soul. Such mythology is an impossible project.

Mythology has to be a kind of description, a tale of something, a system explaining something, rasterization. Mythology is a relation. Romanticism sought to create a mythology for the Soul, for the heart of the heart's human understanding, using Romanticism itself as an object. With the *Self* deeply invested in silent Nature, in dreaming Nature, using symbols inspired from the philosophy of Schelling, where elves, blowers, Aurora, and *Der Blaue Blume*, (Novalis) play roles, and where everything is referring to Romanticism itself, and Romanticism AS art. Romanticism, and Romantic love an understanding, is thus mainly all about itself. The underlying myth is mythology rooted in the pure ideas of Romanticism itself.

In Romanticism, the poets also used the fact that Christianity just was won over, surpassed, and the poets of this school hence might use their mythology ambiguously, and the readers of Romantic Poetry might be all delighted by the vision of a world beyond, without often realizing that the vision they thus had gotten a hint to, was not the Christian paradise at all, but something else. Romanticism was an atheist but used their freedom to allude to anything they wanted to. They stood free to every belief, but without saying so.

Idealism traditionally is a denomination for a philosophical view according to which reality is determined by the (human) conception of it. Transcendental Idealism, like, for instance, that of Hegel's, claims that everything is spiritual. The origin of Philosophical Idealism was Jena and Tübingen in former Prussen. For six years, Jena was the birthplace and growing-pot for these ideas, and the majority of those men, who were to become leaders of this movement, gathered here or had intense contact with people who studied here. Those who later became known as "the Romantic Movement" were: Fichte, Shelling, A. and Fr. Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, Fr. Schleiermacher, Steffens, Hegel (after leaving Frankfurt, where Friedrich Hölderlin had deeply influenced him.) Later, J.W. von Goethe and Friedrich Shiller, (*Über naive und sentimental Dichtung*). They were active in Jena between 1798 och 1804, the year of Imm. Kant's death. These years Europé was transformant. Napoleon became Tzar of France. The Jena-group's main interests - apart from the revolutionary events, the uprising of nationalist movements, and *Dichtung* in general - were the philosophy of the professor of Königsberg Immanuel Kant. Kant's *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft* och *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, had an enormous influence and spurred the younger philosophers to try to go „beyond Kant,“ or to “serve the premises to Kant's conclusions,” as Schelling put it. Schelling would later become a keystone to Romanticism and its poets, but to all the real Romantic theorist philosophers, the most vital voice was Hegel's.

Hegel's breakthrough in the academic world of Prussia came with the enormous dissertation (*Theil I*) of *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. (1807). It was finalized (but worked upon since 1804) while the Prussian and French armies had set up their camps before Jena's battle. The French defeated the Prussian army.

The masterpiece was written at a tremendous pace, and Hegel feared he would go all insane from exhaustion. Hegel's, Fichte's, Schelling's, and Hölderlin's dialectics did span, not just over logic, but also over the universe, over nature, philosophy, and art. Schelling's concept of "Ur-Bild" was to become archetypal for more than a century ahead. The prefix of "Ur" was constructed to nominate or designate a presupposition for the idea and the idea's concept. (We might notice the influence of this thinking in poetry, but all kinds of science, including psychology and psychoanalysis. In a way, Freud was the child of Schelling.) The boundaries between art and science were like in a simple stroke rubbed out. Romantic came, through the miracle of terminology, to be able to aspire upon scientific status. In this magical idealism, which like magic, often saw itself as an object, ideas similar to the psychic life of the philosophers of the day would, in inspired clothing, reaches the land of the beyond. Nature is a petrified wand of an unknown witch, and Nature also was an "encyclopedic index" to the soul. Sensibility took to the scene, and water was declared to be "a moist flame." In a couple of years in the midst of Europe, the old poetry of Sappho had been accentuated into eternity.

Even in science, nothing was the same. A science of evolution was developed before that of the concise and empirical Darwin. Comparative anatomy was born, and Carus presented ideas of a plan according to which life evolved. Lorenz Oken marked that plants and animals were born from a giant "Ur-slime." None of these thoughts had emanated if Schelling in 1797-99 had not shaped the terminology and the vision of an enthusiastic Nature.

In contrast to Hegel, Schelling was stuck in teleology. He assumed that the development of the world had a

purpose, set by God. "Nature is becoming Nature. Nature is unconscious Sense in the process of becoming a Self." Nature had an urge, a "Treib."

Parallel to Romanticism in The Netherlands, Spinoza (in Prussia promoted by Jacobi) had refused to see any difference between organic and inorganic. Spinoza had a principle of universality, much like what was proposed by Schelling *et consortes*. Later Schopenhauer, in his *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* gave his answer to both Kant and the Romantic philosophers, presenting his ambiguous concept of "Das Ding an sich." Arthur Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* was published in 1818, just a few years after Hegel's *Logik I & II* (sequels to the *Phenomenology*), books that made Schelling stop publishing anything at all. Schopenhauer concentrates on the mysterious psychic entity of the Will.

"Hence the subject of the will is immediately given for Self-consciousness, it cannot be defined or described what Will is; it is rather the most immediate of all we know of, yes, it is so immediate, that it will have to throw light on everything else. Everything else is mediate (mediating) entities."

Without knowing anything of Schopenhauer's work, until 1854, the year of his death, S. Kierkegaard would present a philosophy concentrated upon the Will and upon personal choice (the essence of Will) and upon *Innerlighed*, i.e., Sincerity of Heart.

Thus Romanticism slowly, through wise and more prosaic thinkers like Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard and others, was marginalized from the general consciousness. Nevertheless, Romanticism still would stay, like an echo, and like a myth, in the realm of the common unconscious. When Fr Schlegel puts forth his theory of the myth's importance for literature, he is probably aware that myth is a means for power. Romanticism was a rebel, itself. Furthermore,

Romanticism was a question mark. Moreover, it was lust to *Schweben*. Or to dwell deep down in tombs or in castles, like in the British variant. Coleridge and de Quincey were English theorists of the Western school. Romanticism was sidelining religion, and it created a place for symbols about life and Man and served as a catalyst for freedom, emanating from Freud's ideas. Like Hegel and several of the Romantics, Freud created his new paradigm in a haze and a crisis.

Later on, or simultaneous with Freud, Kafka, like he was mirroring him and his time, created a universe of art, using Freud and Romanticism and myths.

Kafka himself was also a Romanticist, insofar as he admitted the view of art as vitally important to personal truth, but he also was a Romanticist in his view and action, that art is the joy of the heart. The play with the myth has to be a joy of the heart. Furthermore, it is crucial to notice that the play with the myth with Kafka is in no way a protest towards Freudianism.

Kafka was open to Freud's ideas, although he did not confirm them. Kafka both mocked Freud and asserted the truth of his ideas! That he did both these things is a strange fact that gives Kafka's work a striking richness, originality, and a contrast effect.

II.

FREUDIANISM

Nevertheless, one question poses itself. What exactly was Kafka's using of Freud as a myth for? How was both lifting the importance of Freud, as well as highlighting a problem with Freudianism? This question might be fancifully rephrased thus: how do we

come to grips with the problem concerning the reverence regarding the Freudian Censor.

Amnesia and distortion [Verzerrung] of memory is regulated from our innermost realm, or more precisely, for Freudian theorist/analyst, from the Censor. Nevertheless, our inmost inner instance is never such that it asserts that amnesia ought to be permanent. Disturbances are planned to be temporary. Our inner world does not have absolute censorship by the type: "Such thing must not happen!" Thus it ought to be erased from the protocol!" No, our inner has – and we do not know why – kind of an absolute demand for truth. Curiously enough, it has an insight in that everything A: has a value of its own, an innate value, a value per se, AS OCCURRED. Moreover, B.) it also has a mediating – instrumental – value, insofar as all events can contribute to creating the most honorable possible human being, for every possible length of any life, where this inner subject is serving. It is thus possible to imagine that the Censor always has Death in view. Because the innermost inner spot, IS not the individual, is not identical with the individual, but the Censor is an essential and mysterious part of the scary and intricate system that composes Man. Furthermore, the Censor is omniscient. He knows almost everything.

Certain phenomena, within this picture of Man, makes everything quite uncertain. What? Well, we do not know the exact agenda of the Censor? Who is THE MASTER of the Censor? It most certainly is primarily not me (in my case). The answer is: we do not know.

The Censor seems to have unlimited memory. Furthermore, the Censor seems to be extraordinarily bright. Even in service with the dumbest person on earth, the Censor has a clear head. The Censor seems to possess almost supernatural wisdom. We do not.

How does the Censor know that A.: We cannot stand to remember the first day in school when we tripped on a threshold and hit a tooth so bad that we lost the tooth. Moreover, how does the Censor, or the Censor's cousin know, that it is any method in that we always get nausea when seeing an a missing tooth or spotting a first-grader?

Alternatively, has the censor nothing to do with nausea. Do the Censor and those who are responsible for nausea have responsibility for two different departments?

Before we continue, we should let ourselves remember that the Censor is not an instance with any knowledge of anything other than our person's history and the experiences we have made. OR HAS HE?

Maybe he has been much more observant than we are? When we have been busy looking only at fancy things, HE might have taken time to observe the overall situation, like furniture, clothing, weather, manner of speech, yes, God only knows! Maybe our Censor and we do not have very much in common. Maybe our Censor has LEARNT things that we have not? Maybe the Censor was the one *who picked up things from the books we read when we just were having the trouble of figuring out what meanings of the words were that we thought we knew.....* Maybe the Censor and we have not at all the same background? Maybe he is the wise fellow that we always dreamt of being? The Censor what is best for us. Of course, if he is that clever. Maybe our Censor is a bit like Einstein?

BUT! And THIS is the important thing. Even if the Censor is the most competent person in the world, he STILL only is human. He does not have anything to do with universal, absolute truth. This is important. Freudian or other psychoanalysts claim that it is as if the messages from the dream and the Censor, which sometimes are referred to in art and literature, these

symbols, in conjunction to events, CARRY UNIVERSAL TRUTH.

Art might rightly refer to our amnesia and point at the truth of, but seldom the limitation of, the Censor. As Freud put him forth, a Romanticist, who does not know a thing about the Censor, might believe that there inside every person is truth. The Romanticist, who is eager to create a myth out of a person's kernel, sometimes thinks he has the truth. Furthermore, when Schlegel wants to create a myth based upon Man's inner kernel, it is this dedicated inner area he is referring to. This inner kernel might make us come to think of the Censor. Or not. *Schlegel's vision is, in short, built upon a vision of universal knowledge of the soul.*

Now, back to the tooth and the schoolboy. We might scrutinize how on earth the Censor can know about what the boy can stand to remember.

The actual case with the tooth. *The Tooth.* The Censor does notice from his central spot that we are hurt and losing the tooth. The Censor knows that we are a small child and that we are getting terrified and shameful. The Censor concludes in a matter of seconds, that it is not the case, that such a small boy can stand this amount of scariness and shame. The Censor realizes that SOME children, who are brave and tough, might stand it, but not this very child, as a person. It here seems like the Censor might think that if the boy forgets this, he might be a better adult. But of course, the Censor thinks, or have thought long ago, that erasing of every unpleasantness might not be a proper thing to do. After all, one never knows if this child NEEDS this memory in the future. It is no way of knowing that. Perhaps it would be a solution if we did it like this: we hide the memory behind a riddle. IF the child is very eager to know what happened on the first day in school, IF HE IS DEAD EAGER, let him know. He must solve a puzzle, however. Thus the Censor is letting the memory of the

tooth remain and does not erase it. Not at all. The Censor also constructs a series of LEADS to the precarious memory of the tooth. For emergency rescue.

By any connection to something white, and at the same time a little edgy, the Censor lets the individual, who now grows up to a man, experience discontent. So the Censor is exceptionally smart in his plan, based upon fairness, justice, and thoughtfulness. The Censor lets the adult experience this uneasiness, and then somebody says it is a riddle in it. He is looking at some mountains with snow on. Rocky mountains. What makes him so uneasy?

Suppose the adult man, who as a boy tripped and hurt himself, now remembers and can come to grips with the old event. Moreover, free himself from the terror and shame? Because to realize all this by experiencing Rocky Mountain was a good thing.

Now, let us ask the Censor what he thinks of why the memory was kept! Well, it is not easy to say.

"I am not an innocent bystander exactly." says the Censor, watching, ogling, looking sly... "Maybe," continues the Censor, "I have not much of choice. Maybe the system could not be arranged - for TECHNICAL REASONS - so that some memories are set to delete. An erase system would be tricky to construct. "Somebody probably arranged beforehand so that I, the Censor, HAD TO exist and had to HIDE the unpleasant memories." The Censor remarks. "I had to be. I am, as a matter of fact, a tragic hero."; "Lots of intelligent people are trying to outsmart me, all the time.", the Censor complains. Amazingly no human being has ever asked himself (or any other person) if possibly his Censor is lying! Nevertheless, maybe it would be too tricky a thought to think. We cannot easily imagine a person who has got a Censor, that is a liar.

Let us return to our main subject, Franz Kafka, or more accurately, Kafka's novels. Say that Kafka is investigating, through his MYTHICAL use, the Freudian theory and the Censor. Now, we thus are having a set of truth-values linked to symbols. These truth-values are, through the use as a symbol system, questioned. The Freudian Censor is questioned as a.) a simple *Abwehr-Mekanism*, or as b.) a VERY CLEVER organizer of the human psyche (the Einstein-Censor) or maybe the all wrong picture of c.) the Censor, that he knows everything, and that he is in connection with God or someone like that?

Another thing of interest with the mythical overt layer in Kafka's work is that the pattern of interpretation, typical when reading Kafka, tends to spread. As many others have pointed out, it is possible to read texts not written by Kafka as Kafka texts. Like for instance, *Don Quixote*.

Kafka's discourse also contains, as a myth, Symbolism. Symbolism deals with universal symbols. Freud's theory is a diagnostic manual, dealing with pathology, where symbols only refer in some cases while they do not do so in others. The Freudian symbol has a varying evidence, and this is in a way interrogative. The symbolist canon and the Freudian enlighten each other ironically. Hence an uneven bi-mythicality appears. Furthermore, the bi-mythical situation - together with the ironical structure - dominates the Kafka universe.

This complexity is what makes the mythical sphere by Kafka so alive! Because we do not know which Censor is referred to. We only observe the product of a Censor working (just like in everyday life). However, the nature of the myth about the Censor - which may not be mythical at all - varies, which makes the myth scary!

We do not know the amount of doubt with which Kafka regarded the Censor. Moreover, this is good for the Kafka novel.

Here Kafka has two myths as underlying layers, or maybe three: The Romantic, the Symbolistic, and the Freudian.

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