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The Contexts of Kafka : Dystopia, Phantasy, Multiculturalism

One way in which stability expresses itself is the establishment of contexts. Why? Because an author, even one that is often described as modern or post-modern, in any case not a traditional kind of writer, can be read and interpreted in connection with other authors, of the past, or of the present, or of quite different environments. On the one hand such a reading is helpful and explanatory, it deepens our appropriation of the author under discussion. On the other hand, a contextual interpretation discovers a multitude of connecting lines between the author (Franz Kafka in our case) and others, thus reducing the impression of irrational disorder, or of total, arbitrary, invention. Contextual methodologies are, I maintain, an excellent technique for establishing a healthy balance between innovation and tradition.

My discussion of Kafka here, chiefly aspires to put on the table a few suggestions that aspire to enrich the multiplicity of contextualizations that are logical and plausible for writers in the mold of Franz Kafka. Such contextualizations, in the tradition of Comparative Literature, do not have to be based on strict historical causality, on social, religious, psychological determinations that can be measured and proved. Rather such parallels can also be theoretical, typological, or generic in their nature. In my view such analogies are as important as other, more firmly deterministic founded, contextualizations and explanations. In fact they can also serve as reliable vindications of the significance of the author. Such contextual approaches may be as numerous as the complexity of the author under discussion allows. In our case I will concentrate on three larger categories.

These are, in the first place the utopian/dystopian tradition which, to the best of my knowledge, has been seldom used as a tool in Kafka studies. Second, the somewhat more frequently examined connection with the Romantic and post-Romantic fantastic tradition, including a quick look at some contemporary (or almost-contemporary) figures; this I will do primarily with the intention of providing a foundation to the dystopian argument, , i.e. in order to show how the first is the crystallization of the broader second (fantastic) argument. Finally, and third, I will add a very few allusions to possible analogies to the techniques of non-European writings, especially one major classical Chinese novel. My methodology will not seek depth, it will rather deal in extension, it will pursue the dimension of breadth. That is why I will limit myself to the discussion of a relatively small number of prominent works.

Let me begin by recalling a few generally known and accepted facts. Dystopia is not one of the subgenres that is often discussed in histories of fictional literature. The reasons are easy to understand. Like its elder sister, utopia/eutopia, dystopia finds itself at the crossing point of three vast and powerful realms of discourse and action: politics, religion, and literature. It does not fully belong to any of them, but it would be difficult to understand by eliminating even a single one of the three. As a consequence, the critic and the reader are never certain that either utopia or dystopia have a full identity of their own or can be regarded as autonomous species. One of the main roots of utopia is found in the generic tradition of the pastoral and the idyll. Dystopia in turn calls from the world of satire and of the grotesque. Thus, almost immediately the question arises whether, and, if so, to what extent, these two can or should be regarded as autonomous branches of fiction.

Utopian works, usually facing toward the past rather than the future, were frequent in Classical Antiquity (Greek and Latin), as well as in religious/mythological/literary works of Ancient Mideastern cultures. Hesiod's *Works and Days* (c. 700 BC) and a long string of authors from Pindar to Diodorus Siculus (5th century-1st century BC) refer to both the Elysian Fields, the Golden Age ("illo tempore" in the felicitous phrase disseminated by Mircea Eliade), and the Blessed Isles. Plato's *Republic* and his *Laws* contain significant utopian elements. The Biblical Garden of Eden had its counterpart in the Sumerian *Enmerkar* (4th millennium BC) and in the widely known *Gilgamesh* (2nd millennium BC), later in sections of the *Arabian Nights* .

The emergence of Christianity coincided with (and was succeeded by) a remarkable abundance of apocalyptic writings (Jewish, Gnostic, Mideastern) the common feature of which was precisely the connection of the remote (mythical?) past with the radical change of the future. Specifically inside Christianity the expectation of a prompt return of the Messiah and the subsequent transfiguration of the cosmos was a mode of interpretation that was exceptionally powerful and durable. It led to formidable utopian movements, generally surging out of the lower and less educated or less affluent classes. These began immediately, already during the 1st century AD and where thereafter transferred from the Mideast to the West. Some of the latter took a purely narrative form: thus the "Schlaraffenland", "land of cockayne" and their equivalents in other languages and countries during the Middle Ages. Others took theoretical forms: the constitution of the mendicant orders of the Franciscans and of the Dominicans (whose origins indicated strong features of utopianism) in the early Middle Ages (not to speak of less structured movements such as millenarianism or the "flagellants", to mention just a few), or the writings of the "Marx of the Middle Ages", Joachim of Fiore (1145-1202), or, for that matter, of their female utopian equivalent, Christine de Pizan (c. 1364-c.1431). Some were violently suppressed such as the Albigenians, others, like the above-mentioned mendicant orders could be captured and integrated in the mainstream of Christianity. Finally others turned to physical action, in the sense that they tried to bring about or accelerate an event that was supposed to happen in any case. Thus utopianism was one of the complex motivations of the Crusades, as well as of diverse peasant revolts: John Ball in England (1381), Jan Huss (1412-1415) in Bohemia, or Thomas Muntzer(1488-1525) in the Rhineland.

These mostly populist and lower-class movements of the Medieval period were replaced beginning with the late 15th century by much more rationalist and indeed aristocratic variants, as expressed in the writings of Campanella, Morus, Bacon, Margaret Cavendish (the Duchess of Newcastle) and a number of other luminaries. Architectural utopias became fashionable along with the beginnings of scientific-technical utopias. From a literary point of view it is interesting that such authors strove hard to provide some kind of narrative framework to their "scenarios", while remaining, on the whole, primarily descriptive. But if we want to look at them as remote ancestors of Kafka and of other modernists and post-modernists than, taken together, they constitute a remarkable example of continuity and durability.

Despite the robust presence of such writings, it is only during and after the Romantic Age that we notice a genuine turning point. This was due to two rather different causes. One was the often adduced explosive informational increase and the more and more obvious inability of more and more people to handle it. Of course the implication was that the "march

of history” itself was speeded up or seemed to be speeded up. Therefore what could be regarded as “remote future”, armchair reverie, “gemutlich” discussion, suddenly became or seemed to become an urgent matter, a description of the present or of the near future. Thus both utopia and the fear and doubt about utopia (dystopia) became matters of vigorous topicality.

The second was the Romantic revaluation of fantasy as one of the key human features and faculties, equal in dignity with reason or with virtue. From a literary point of view fantasy became highly important, a permanent presence in writing and in critical discourse.

Likewise there were two main consequences. The first of these was the advent of science-fiction as an autonomous genre. Conventionally we consider the publication of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) as the cornerstone or fountainhead of the genre. This is not entirely true, in the sense that, already works such as Sir Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis, sundry fictions by Restif de la Bretonne and others might equally well be considered precursors of “science-fiction”. Nevertheless the clear-cut literary nature of Frankenstein gives it well-deserved prominence, together with the way in which philosophical, technical-scientific, and social issues are masterfully interwoven in the clearly literary mode. Last but not least is the fact that Frankenstein clearly outlines a central issue of any later piece of science-fiction: the dialectic of the utopian and the dystopian, the multiple conflicts between the good, the doubtful, and the evil prepared by tempestuous future evolutions. Frankenstein was surrounded, needless to add, by multiple contemporary Romantic works (the short-stories and novels of E.T.A. Hoffmann are a good example) in which the imaginary or oneiric and the technical seemed to collaborate.

The second consequence was the fact that, owing to the renewed legitimacy of imagination, works of utopian and dystopian origin could in turn feel a freedom of full expression. Indeed, what we see in the 19th century, from Edgar Allan Poe and Lord Bulwer-Lytton to Jules Verne and H.G.Wells (and many others, not least among them the strongly religious Lord of the World (1907) by R. H. Benson, or Vladimir Solovyov’s 1900 Story of the Antichrist) is precisely this resort to the powers of phantasy in order to enrich the mere skeletons or “scenarios” on which, as I said, utopian writing had relied primarily until then. Edward Bellamy’s influential Looking Backward (1889) also belongs here, as does the much later and more complex Glasperlenspiel of Hermann Hesse.

We have to wait for the 20th century in order to observe how utopian writing gradually turns into dystopian writing. Works such as Karel Capek’s RUR (1920), Evgeny Zamyatin’s We (1927, first edition), Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World (1932), George Orwell’s 1984 (1949), Anthony Burgess’ The Wanting Seed (1962), Kingsley Amis’ Russian Hide-and-Seek (1980) and perhaps also the same author’s counter-historical The Alteration (1976), Ernst Junger’s Glaserne Bienen (1957) and to some extent Heliopolis (1949), Vladimir Nabokov’s Invitation to a Beheading (1938) and particularly the same’s Bend Sinister (1947), Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale (1986) or her Oryx and Cracker (2003) and many others ought to be mentioned here. It is here, as I hope to show, that we can find a real connection with many and major anthropofugal writings, not only those of Franz Kafka but also those of Jorge Luis Borges, Julien Gracq, Eugene Ionesco, or Dino Buzzatti.

We discover thus a dense network of works that in a Cassandra-like voice signal the approach or the arrival of a dangerous, undesirable, and ultimately anti-human type of future, even when some of them suggest happier alternative scenarios. These utopian/dystopian works also explore various modes of possible survival for the truly human individual, with various options, tragic, comic, or ambiguous. There can be not the slightest doubt that we have a prominent and convincing situation in which the innovative and “overthrowing” impulse is just the flip side of an important mode of stabilization and of genuine, tenacious, identity.

How is the work of Franz Kafka inserted in this dystopian mode of writing? First, by the complexity (not to say ambiguity) of the referential level. Second we can think of its connection and analogy with Alfred Kubin. Third we can bring up the issue of descriptiveness as related (again, in a network of dialectical complexity) with the option for fictional narrativity.

To begin with the first, it should be underlined that in most of the dystopian works enumerated the realistic referential level is complex and ambiguous. Thus Huxley seems to attack primarily the capitalist-liberal system, but features of totalitarianism abound in his above-mentioned book (e.g. there is a kind of “central committee” etc). Orwell deals apparently in a straightforward mode with a potential scenario of Communist domination. Yet Burgess’ witty and perceptive 1985 also indicates that many of the book’s most vividly realistic features are borrowed from the world of England and from the BBC subculture as these appeared at the end of the 1940s. Nabokov’s Bend Sinister is founded on an exquisitely careful balance between the world of Nazism and that of Communism. Likewise, Ernst Junger in the above-mentioned narratives, as well as in features of other two remarkable works (Auf den Marmorklippen, and Eumeswil) alludes to a dangerous future in which right-wing, left-wing and centrist forms of totalitarianism seem to blend easily. Atwood’s Handmaid’s Tale speaks about a potential right-wing theocratic regime in North America, but its concrete details are borrowed from the actually existing Communist regime in Romania at the time of the novel’s writing and publication. Even more strikingly, Burgess’ The Wanting Seed depicts a state of affairs where two dystopian regimes succeed and replace each other cyclically: one leftist and “politically correct”, the other authoritarian conservative and militarist. In the same author’s famous Clockwork Orange the two “opposed” dystopian regimes are depicted in full synthesis, all the way to the imaginary language spoken.

A number of critics (including Adorno and von Lukacs) have already noted the dystopian character of some key Kafkian writings (see also the important essay of Soring). However, their judgment that Kafka was predicting fascism is reductive or incomplete, in my opinion. Why? Because Central European Nazi regimes usually had a wolf-like ferocity, they acted by sudden predatory raids, by unexpected and feral violence. This makes them rather different from the kind of evil depicted or suggested by Kafka. His narratives present many more analogies to Communism and to its social procedures, a point that has been rarely made, but one that is confirmed by the constant adversity of Classical Marxists (such as von Lukacs, although not that of the “reformist” Marxists, like Benjamin, Adorno, Fischer or Garaudy) against the Prague writer. (Significant is also the hostility of the Soviet and of the so-called “DDR”-critics against Kafka; a short overview in Binder II, 808-810, 452, 426). What goes on in most of Kafka’s stories is that he can obviously refer only to his contemporary socio-

historical environment. However, with the fine intuition and powerful imagination of the truly major writer he can sense *inside* this state of affairs, one still located within the borders of normality, the outlines of a new kind of evil. Obviously, like the many dystopian authors enumerated above, Kafka deals with totalitarian aspects that are common to different practical systems. In saying this, we admit implicitly that a multitude of concrete details by which this totalitarian danger is presented to the reader are similar to the practices of Communism. In any case, how do we explain these analogies? The structural stylistics of the stories offer some good clues. With laser-like precision Franz Kafka distinguishes the growth of the new, emerging society out of the one already existing. There is a narrative dynamic that ensures transitions from the mimetic to the authoritarian to the totalitarian. Kafka was able to intuit such transitions and distinctions even without the theoretical support of earlier or later theoreticians such as Benjamin Constant, Hannah Arendt, or Jeanne Kirkpatrick.

So far we have talked about authors that were mostly not contemporary with Kafka. Others, such as Meyrink were contemporary and are related in their thematics. Of these, as I said, I choose to underline the function and nature of Alfred Kubin, as expressed particularly in his novel Die andere Seite (1909).

Perhaps a few words of introduction would be useful for many readers. The public at large will know that Kubin was a photographer and an illustrator and drawer; he is usually grouped with the Expressionist movement, although his emphasis on the fantastic and the nightmarish places him in the tradition of Callot, Piranesi, Fuseli and E.T.A. Hoffmann. His prose-work is limited, about half of it is constituted of memoirs and biographical material; in any case it did not achieve wide popularity. Nevertheless, I believe that at least Die andere Seite is the peer of Kafka's writings in quality and structural similarity. Like his contemporary (the two were acquainted), Kubin writes well before the installation of totalitarian systems, but describes their effects upon human beings equally well. The subject of his novel (as that of most dystopian works) is relatively simple. A rich visionary, by the name of Claus Patera ("pater" being, obviously, the Latin for "father") decides to construct in a region remote from Europe (an imaginary Central Asia) a perfect and happy city ("Perle"), a "dream realm" ("Traumreich") He attracts the inhabitants by advertising, but sends pointedly an emissary to a former middle-school colleague in order to invite the colleague and his wife to emigrate and join the currently 12,000 inhabitants in the perfect city, one which, unlike most dystopian constructions, but not unlike Kafka's visions, looks not towards the future, but rather towards the past: it rejects any signs of modernity. Lavish travel expenses to the city of Perle are included.

The city proves to be deeply disappointing. It is seedy, poverty-stricken, pervaded by fear and uncertainty. The neighborhoods differ from each other to the point of hostility. The narrator finds with difficulty a modest job with a newspaper, his wife dies partly out of psychological reasons, departure proves difficult, if not impossible, the great leader Patera is impossible to reach directly. The arrival of a rich, enterprising, but ruthless American, Hercules Bell, coincides with acts of violence, epidemics, explosions, arson and finally outright revolution. The American, who presents some ambiguous parallels with Lucifer, is clearly engaged in a sort of mysterious power-struggle with Patera, during which they they oneirically seem to merge into each other. Patera appears sometimes as a giant, sometimes as

an old, weak and tired dwarf. European troops intervene (led by the Russian general Rudinoff) and complete the downfall of the dream-empire. To increase the universal incongruity the narrator weeps bitterly over the collapse and has to undergo therapeutic treatment upon his return to the “normal “ world.

Even this very short presentation indicates, I think, quite clearly, the similarities between Alfred Kubin and Franz Kafka which have been less often noticed. (See however Neuhauser, Lemaire, and Cersowsky; before them Achleitner)

The third of the points that deserves to be discussed here is that there are some apparent differences between utopian/dystopian writing and Kafka's oeuvre (in particular works such as Der Prozess and Das Schloss) - specifically in that the latter is apparently not descriptive, or systematic. However I do not find this conclusive enough. On the one hand, there do exist a number of dystopian productions (for instance those of Burgess, Junger, and others) that are primarily narrative, not descriptive. On the other hand, and more important in my view, the reader of Kafka's above-mentioned texts does find in them enough indications for imagining a constitutive framework. Thus, unquestionably, Das Schloss is placed in an alternative world. This world has a number of features, such as an unfathomable series of power strata. Likewise, authority is distributed in strange and unpredictable ways, the position and status of the land-surveyor and of his assistants changes several times, the psychology of the villagers undergoes unexpected modifications, the flow of time is different from the regular one, society seems to be often matriarchal (see Boa in Preece, 69-70). All these taken together constitute a rather convincing image of a dystopian realm.

Quite similar, but even more emphatic is the dystopia in Der Prozess. There, we discover gradually the hidden universe, which step by step takes over and swallows the normal world. The very title of the book is false in as far as we find everything and anything in it except for an actual trial. There are two levels of judicial procedure: one habitual and rule-directed, the other secretive and devoid of any rules. Banal and socially irrelevant types acquire a tremendous importance and weight: run-of-the-mill lawyers and the servant-maid of at least one of them, a bizarre portrait-painter, unexpected neighbors. The agents of the law behave by turn as threatening thugs and as grovelling serfs. Accusations, indictments, even sentencings are hidden from the principals to whom they apply. The slowly uncovered world is dangerous and evil. Inside it sexuality is used as bribe and as punishment. Perhaps the most striking feature is the “upside-down” nature of the venues: filthy attics, shabby buildings, musty corridors, seedy rooms, a mixture of the intimate (linen-washing rooms and the like) and of the official. Ambiguous religious messages intervene (as in the penultimate chapter). Together these constitute, even more clearly than in Das Schloss the structure of a dystopian society.

In passing, I will make some observations on two other works by Kafka that are both relevant for the issue of his dystopian interests. One of them is obviously the short-story In der Strafkolonie with its mercilessly sadistic tone. If indeed Kafka's descriptions there were inspired, at least partly, by the cruel repression of the Herrero tribe in the Southwest-African colonial possessions of Germany, then we do have a highly interesting example of Kafka's processual dynamics from the mimetic to the present outline and finally to the futuristic. The other is the novel Amerika. As shown by Sokel and by Loose, among others, this novel is not a “hard-line” dystopia. Nevertheless, the general impression of the reader is one of unease and danger, and we can recognize some specific Kafkian techniques, in chapters such as the

famous one on the “stoker” and in the episode of Karl’s summary and unjust dismissal from his hotel job. Both indicate vaguely but with some clarity the kind of world more fully depicted in the Prozess.

II

I would now like to turn to the fantastic, in as far as it is the wider contextual circle of the dystopian. This has also the advantage, as part of my argument, that Kafka’s fantastic is the foundation for the writer’s involvement with dystopia: there are similarities of structure that can be easily recognized.

To be sure, many have paid close attention to the presence of the fantastic in Kafka’s writings.(Binder, II, 119-121, 331-3). A simple and very good classification is to be found in the short work of the Peruvian critic Miguel Gutierrez. He distinguishes four kinds of Kafkian phantastic: narrations on metamorphosis (besides Die Verwandlung, also Ein Bericht für eine Akademie, Der neue Advokat), narrations on strange animals or such as are in strange relations with the humans (Das Schweigen der Sirenen, Eine Kreuzung, Schakale und Araber, and others), narrations of speaking animals (Forschungen eines Hundes, Josefine die Sangerin) and narratives that express the narrator’s desire to be turned into inanimate matter (e.g.Prometheus, Die Sorge des Hausvaters, Der Jäger Grachus and others). Now as to direct parallels, they were established particularly with his Romantic predecessors such as Kleist (Dittkrist; Binder, I,379; and Oskar Walzel at the very beginnings of Kafka research), ETA Hoffmann (among many others see Wollner), Gogol (Parry and many others), sometimes Dickens, but also major figures like Goethe (Hodin, among others; one should add here the Biedermeier connection through Stifter, Bozena Nemcova and Ludwig Richter – Binder I, 488, I, 516), Dostoyevsky (Binder, I, 464; Poggioli), Tolstoy (a matter already mentioned by early friends such as Brod and Klopstock) in terms of their ideas, Borges (who wrote himself several times on Kafka and stimulated a whole younger Latin-American generation, including Lezama Lima, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and others; see among numerous studies, Garavito, also Caeiro in Binder, II, 705-721), all the way to unexpected figures, like Hemingway (Gordon)

Critics presented as substitutes of the fantastic what were in fact for Kafka, I believe, just connecting and mediating elements, such as the grotesque (Kassel), the oneiric (Kassel, 31-34, Binder, II, 49), the surrealistic (Binder, II, 681-2) or the tragicomic (alternatively the tragic-ironic by Sokel e.g.). I regard this as a kind of back-pedaling in the face of Kafka’s rather specific discourse of the fantastic. Intelligently, it has been pointed out that Kafka was not primarily an author of the absurd, but one who depicted the fear of the absurd. (Chaix; also very good Goth on the connection with surrealism, and above all the great Oskar Walzel who, already in 1916, fully understood the distinctive features of Kafka’s fantastic). The fact is that much more often critics and researchers have concentrated on dimensions such as psychology, existentialism, religion and myth, issues of identity (individual or communitarian) inside Kafka’s work.

Perhaps the explanation is that Kafka exerts with tremendous talent and virtuosity a somewhat different method and sort of fantasy than we usually encounter in earlier literary

writings. In a simplified way, we might distinguish two main directions of costumary literary fantasy. The first is the depiction of a completely alternative world, that is to say one in which our habitual rules and natural or social laws, as well as the ordinary physical forms and psychological principles are no longer valid at all (the books of J.R.R. Tolkien might be one example among many). The other is one in which the narrative zig-zags or switches between the natural world and some kind of extra-natural one (this is the case with ETA Hoffmann to take one instance among many others possible, particularly among Romantic writers).

By contrast Kafka envisages a fantastic that wakens *inside* normality and grows slowly, stealthily, we might say slyly, yet in such a way that it cannot be stopped. It is a fantastic of the interior, rather than of the exterior, a fantastic that is almost always maleficent, parasitical and destructive, but eats normality or reality from the inside out. To repeat, this fantastic grows smoothly inside the ordinary and the predictable, horror and the absurd emerge eventually, often with terrible and tragic results. Opposition to this evolution is usually existent, but seems entirely futile. The best and fullest example is provided in Der Prozess (as indicated above), but it can also be seen in Das Schloss and even in Die Verwandlung (though it is slightly different there, since the whole story begins with the powerful strike of the unexpected metamorphosis; nevertheless, even in this short story this relentless internal progress can be recognized, accompanied by rather passive despair). This specific way of treating the fantastic explains, in a sense, and certainly provides an underpinning of Kafka's handling of the dystopian.

As a corollary, the following deserves some attention. The influence of Kafka's mode of using the fantastic should not be examined only when it is direct and immediate, rather it should be seen sometimes under the form of a successive series of connecting links. A friend and admirer such as Fritz von Herzmanovsky-Orlando became a key figure in the 20th century Neo-Baroque movement in Austrian fiction. He and others undoubtedly accepted some Kafkian influences, although in other ways he was quite different from Kafka. Dino Buzzati and Julien Gracq were perhaps less influenced directly by Kafka, and rather by Borges (at least the former). Nevertheless they are rightly seen as Kafkian descendants. Hermann Kasack's Die Stadt hinter dem Strom of 1946 might also be described as the work of a talented disciple. Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco (to some extent Robbe-Grillet, cf. Binder II, 687, 699, 702) are also "indirect" Kafkians; we can recognize extremely powerful analogies with Kafka in their writings: the loss of the individual, the person's domination by and crushing under impersonal forces, the tragicomic, the dystopian echoes and numerous others. More generally, the movement that came to be described as "magical realism" (I mentioned the names of a few noted South Americans before) is deeply indebted to Kafka's mode of dealing with the fantastic. I will dwell however in some more detail precisely on two authors who are relatively distant from Kafka, but who would have been, I believe, impossible without his pioneering work.

Jean Raspail was born in 1925 and he was an avid globe-trotter, perhaps he could be described as an explorer. His orientation was that of a staunch old-line Catholic and conservative royalist. His main works are pessimistic and pervaded with uncertainties and emotional regret. In this short sketch he might be better characterized by pointing to similarities with other French writers of the 20th century such as Julien Gracq and Michel Tournier. We are however reminded of Kafka also, when we look at the more fantastic among

his numerous works. One of Raspail's novels deals with the past and the potential future of Catholic Christianity. (*L'Anneau du pecheur* 1995) Another, even more openly fantastic is a scenario of the collapse of Europe under the weight of sudden, aggressive "third-world" immigration (*Le Camp des saints* 1973) . The one that I would like to stop and briefly examine here is called *Septentrion*. It was published in 1979. The subject is quite simple on the face of it. An unnamed country is, for unnamed reasons, taken over by a faceless dictatorship. All its authorities, indeed all its citizens, seem now to be called "Rudeau" (with all the implications of grossness and brutality the name carries). About three dozen dissidents manage to capture a princely train that they set moving toward a mythical "North". (It should be said that this idea of a tiny remnant after or during a general disaster is a *topos* in Raspail's prose: we encounter it in *Camp des saints* , in *Sept cavaliers* ... and elsewhere.) In *Septentrion* the group is as eclectic as one can imagine. The leader of the group is Kendall Kurtis, a merchant-adventurer , accompanied by his mistress, Clara de Hutte. There is a handful of military (hussars and dragoons) led by the lieutenant Nicolas Suvorov and the police brigadier Werner von Golitz, a priest (Father Serge), the puppet-master Sempronius, two waiters, two locomotive engineers belonging to the Bactrian ethnic minority of the "Ouaks", several children and women (the actress Maria Valera standing out) and sundry others, not least the narrator, a former journalist named himself Rudeau. The country is supposed to be thin and elongated, much like Chile, except that it is situated in the far north. The railway had been constructed by prince Peter II in 1887 and had eight stations from the capital Saint-Basile to the terminus Octoville; however the localities had been abandoned years ago, in 1910, and their inhabitants repatriated to the South, as the journal kept by Otto von Pikkendorff, the military commander of Petroquarto (the 4th station) indicates. The hope of the fugitives is to meet the quasi-mythical forest tribe of the Ouimiats, who might provide them with some help.

The flight proves to be hopeless. The fugitives are pursued relentlessly, attacked, and harassed, or so they have the impression, by either their enemies, or ghostly and death-bringing apparitions, or else by their own "double". Gradually some of them die or disappear, by accident, by aggression, by suicide perhaps, or simple disappearance (as in the case of the children). The Ouimiats are not found, although one train-dweller or the other seems to detect occasionally traces of them. The initial luxurious life on the train gradually wanes: food reserves dwindle, the cruel arctic cold takes over, darkness falls as days become shorter and shorter, living-conditions become more and more precarious. Feelings of pointlessness and despair gradually take over. Ultimately the void of unreality overcomes them. The narrator in the end no longer knows whether he is a madman on a medical train, or a genuine fugitive rebel. (Here the similarity to Kubin is stronger than to Kafka). The documents that conclude the novel might well indicate the former.

The novel is perhaps also inspired by the tragic ending of Admiral A.V. Kolchak, the most talented and honorable of the counter-revolutionary leaders during the Russian civil wars after the Communist revolution. Defeated in Siberia he took refuge with a small band of followers on the Trans-Siberian train and crossed the enormous Asian part of Russia, hotly pursued by the Red Army, before his final defeat and execution. The theme of irremediable defeat, very frequent in Raspail's novels, is gently introduced when the narrator believes he

hears the “hymn of Maximilian” (the brother of the Austrian Emperor Franz-Joseph and haplessly short ruler of Mexico, who ended his life in 1867 in front of Benito Juarez’s execution squad). The transition from the real to the imaginary is masterfully achieved by Raspail, and, as I said, it may well have been impossible without the new foundations laid by Kafka in the treatment of the relationship between the real and the fantastic, even though the influence is not direct, but indirect, as indicated above.

To strengthen my case I will also mention here the much younger Romanian fiction- and poetry writer Mircea Cartarescu (b. 1956). The prose experiments of Cartarescu enjoyed a measure of international visibility and interest in France, Spain, Germany, and elsewhere. These included prominently *Nostalgia* (1993) and *Travesti* (1994) in which androgynous, homosexual and trans-gender themes figured prominently, well-embedded in dreamlike and fantastic contexts. However Cartarescu’s major prose achievement is the trilogy *Orbitor* (“blinding”), the volumes of which appeared in 1997, 2002, and 2007 under the sub-titles of “the left wing”, “the body”, and the right-wing. These sub-titles are supposed to suggest the emergence of a butterfly, the over-arching metaphor of the book. The trilogy could be understood as a kind of *Bildungsroman* complete with family-history, depicting the birth of the poet and of his fantasy inside of and using materials drawn from the completely banal and ordinary circumstances in the years of Communist dictatorship and earlier. In the first, as well as in the second volume the narrator describes childhood and adolescence experiences in marginal parts of Bucharest where he lives with his socially modest parents, while the third describes the revolutionary events of Bucharest in 1989 seen through the eyes of a naive teenager. Perhaps the most remarkable achievement of the narration is the brilliant way in which it slides tangentially outside reality and back into the most trivial and matter of fact circumstances.

The butterfly from which the subtitles derive grows out of the cocoon, as fantasy does out of reality. Thus for instance both in volume one and two Cartarescu offers detailed depictions of orgiastic scenes in which incest, (suggestions of) cannibalism, and indiscriminate sexuality are unloosed under a quasi-religious sign. Elsewhere (vol. II) the underage narrator goes to the circus where suddenly the acting freaky figures begin to step out of their roles and to engage in monstrous and frightening actions. Likewise, as the child follows the labor of his mother on weaving carpets, the abstract images on the carpets begin to construct themselves into a fantastic, trans-imaginary cosmos. These and numerous other oneiric episodes are seamlessly connected with the child’s drab existence and growth in somewhat seedy neighborhoods of the capital city and in rather banal childhood and adolescent activities and interactions with his peers. Additionally *Orbitor* is suffused with references to scientific (particularly anatomical and physiological) facts that suggest to the reader above all the overwhelming accumulation of information of our contemporaneity.

These two examples will perhaps be sufficient in suggesting that the Kafkian tradition is by now constituting a solid and broad sub-genre in the interior of fantastic literature. It also indicates, in my opinion, the extremely strong connection of the fantastic and the dystopian. For this particular mode of understanding the fantastic, the latter appears not primarily or exclusively as shining hope and superior to reality, but, on the contrary, as nightmarish, frightening, and objectively dangerous - a realm in which not only just the psychological and the symbolic find some release, but one that is an alternative world in itself. We are no

longer talking about a paradisiacal hope, but about a competing and overlapping kind of reality. The purely philosophical concept of the plurality of worlds gains here a perilous implication, it is an option looming inside the human being, threatening at every moment to supersede in the real world and to smash or replace it altogether: which is in fact what happens in different degrees and modes in post-Kafkaian prose writing. Escapism is no longer a possibility, a true level beyond the banalities of day-to-day life, it is no longer the response to the travails and agonies of normal existence, it is, on the contrary, the *worst* possibility, the hellish world that may be expected by those who object too much to reality as it is. The transformation of utopia into dystopia is the opposite of hope. The traditional religious principle of hope as contrary to optimism becomes part of the referential backgrounds in this relatively new tradition. On the one hand paradisiacal escape is denied, on the other hand the utopian/dystopian project is brought back into the realm of the literary. The reader is thus obliged to admit that the fantastic is not a parallel plane, but an actual facet of reality. There are no decisive frontiers between the two. Reality is never complete without the fantastic, while the fantastic is no longer a successful flight from reality. The two are *complementary faces of an integral whole*, according to the authors discussed - a concept that I consider as quintessentially Kafkaian. Evil and good, ugly and beautiful are, from this point of view equally indispensable for existence on the one hand, and for our understanding on it, on the other. Implicitly, reality become multiplicity, the universe - a multiverse. The mission of the writer is to plunge into this kind of plurality and to explore it as deeply and seriously as possible.

Nothing could be more persuasive than this. On the one hand, the innovative and convulsive turns out to be inscribed in a matrix of traditions (past, present, and ulterior) and constitute itself into an element of solidity although deriving from fluid and aerial forces. On the other hand, elements and events that were extremely "subversive" and thus part and parcel of the "whirlwind" environment of disturbance and instability, turns to function as kind of sturdy critique of the environment with which it had been solidary and which it was supposed to express and advocate.

III

Attempts to deal with a "multicultural Kafka" have often been unfounded and far-fetched. The theories of Homi Bhaba or Mary Louise Pratt were applied (Goebel **B**) after a tortured attempt to show that some Kafkaian works (notably In der Strafkolonie or The Chinese Wall) were direct political allegories dealing with colonialism. We have to tread lightly when we speak about Kafka's political views in a stricter sense. There are many reports of Kafka's closeness to anarchist circles, some of them credible, some of them less so (Binder I, 361-368). These should not be ignored. However other elements of Kafka's *Weltanschauung* should not be overlooked either. Among these is his active involvement as a college student with the Brentano circle (Binder, I, 286 -9), which had a conservative underpinning, philosophically speaking. His respect or admiration for Goethe and Tolstoy are also factors to be considered. Kafka was actually a rather voracious reader and one with a well-rounded education. That is why a certain "universal" context is possible and desirable in understanding

his work. The fantastic, as outlined in my previous section is the best path for entering into a speculation on Kafka's connections with non-Western literatures.

The most efficient strategy is to look at Kafka's narrative techniques and to compare them to those of universal extra-Western figures. Thus Kafka's influence upon Jorge Luis Borges is sufficiently well known. We have also mentioned briefly what we called the "indirect" influence upon Gabriel Garcia Marquez, particularly in novels such as A Hundred Years of Solitude and The Death of the Patriarch, where the fantastic and the real coexist and co-inhabit the same body of facts. (cf e.g. Gutierrez, 189-190)

However nobody has observed, I believe, some interesting analogies with the major Chinese classical novel The Pilgrimage to the West. (I want to note here that I do not plan to handle in any detail the matter of Kafka's reception in other cultures; see e.g. Ren Weidong). This somewhat picaresque epic describes the expedition of a venerable scholar to the "West" (which we call nowadays the Mideast) in order to recuperate some ancient spiritual documents. Being of a meek, credulous, peaceful, and studious temperament, Master Tripitaka could not have pursued his quest without help. He finds as disciples and supporters three grotesque and morally ambiguous, but resourceful characters, half-human, half-monstrous, chiefly the "stone monkey". These are the peers and the appropriate matches of the adversaries encountered along the way. These enemies present themselves more often than not as "normal" inhabitants of the earth - peasants, monks, local lords, old women - but soon turn into monstrous figures, super-human in power and capacity, often local or indigenous natural half-deities. The Pilgrimage to the West is an inextricable combination of the mythical and the ordinary, a continuous stepping in and out from the fantastic to the mundane and back. I am firmly convinced that a closer examination would prove convincingly that there are some interesting similarities with Kafka's techniques of writing and that the reception effects upon the reader offer surprising parallels. These appear to be all founded upon the way in which the extra-normal and the shocking are embedded and hidden inside the purely natural.

The same is true, in my opinion, of other "third-world" writings, beyond Marquez or other South Americans. One more name will therefore suffice. It is that of Amos Tutuola (of course other Nigerian writers, e.g. Wole Soyinka might be brought up). In Tutuola's main masterpiece which I regard in some ways (e.g. richness of unbridled fantasy and stunning variety of imagery) superior to and carrying more impact than even the works of the German Romantics we recognize certain narrative techniques that could be fruitfully compared to those of Franz Kafka. Again we have a certain quest and again the main character encounters a world that has some of the features of the natural and real world, closely combined with forms of existence that are extra-natural; the adventures are based on the need of the characters to adapt to this unusually hybrid world.

IV

There is little need for a detailed conclusion. I tried to bring together some new elements with some that have already been noticed by researchers or attentive readers. My line of argument is that Kafka is not primarily or exclusively an explosive "avant-garde" writer, although he often functioned in this way. He is actually well inscribed in a tradition

and in circles after circles of surrounding contexts. Kafka is more valuable when we look at him in his multiple ties and connections. If we truly want to consider Kafka a writer of a somewhat universal appeal, and not merely a provincial product of a certain time and place than we must look carefully at these ties and at these contexts, that is to say at parallels with other writers, movements, techniques. Once we have done this, we realize that at least part of the “post-modernist” chaos is constituted out of an aggregate of identities and of continuities.

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