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A LITERARY PROTOTYPE OF THE DEPRESSIVE CHARACTER

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Severe and Mild Depression

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Jules Bemporad

> Dearest Father,
>
> You asked me recently why I maintain that I am afraid of you. As usual I was unable to think of any answer to your questions, partly for the very reason that I am afraid of you, and partly because an explanation of the grounds for this fear would mean going into far more details than I could even approximately keep in mind while talking.

In this dramatic manner, Franz Kafka, at the age of thirty-six began one of the great literary confessions of all time (Kafka, 1973). This "letter to his father" remains as a remarkably moving and insightful human document which reveals the intricacies, the pain, and the strength of Kafka's pathological bond to his father and the disaster that this relationship brought to Kafka's life. In this lengthy letter, Kafka analyzes with remarkable skill the causes of his

depressive paralysis and the role of his childhood experiences in his difficulties in facing a responsible adult existence. The letter is both an *apologia pro vita sua* and an attempt at reconciliation with the father. Franz gave the letter to his mother for her to give to his father. Ironically and yet quite understandably, she never delivered it.

Franz Kafka has been selected as a well-known paradigm of the depressive character, since in his writings as well as in his life he exemplifies the dilemma of the depressive and writes of this dilemma with such eloquence and imagination that his works transcend the impersonal and narrow textbook descriptions of depression. In choosing Kafka to represent a man obsessed with the conflicts of depression, I have not been blind to his extensive contributions toward laying bare the universal problems of modern man. His existentialism is beautifully portrayed throughout his work, especially in *The Castle,* in which man repeatedly attempts to serve a god who simply will not respond and yet who appears to demand continued servitude. Georg Lukacs commented on the sinister emptiness of Kafka's castle: "If a god is present here, he is a god of religious atheism: Atheos Absconditus." (Cited in Politzer, 1966, p. 234.) Similarly, *The Trial* wearies the reader with its repeated dehumanization of man by an endless, mysterious bureaucracy. Martin Buber, who knew Kafka and published his work, sees in *The Trial* "a district delivered over to the authority of a slovenly bureaucracy without the possibility of appeal . . . Man is called into this world, he is appointed in it, but

wherever he turns to fulfill his calling he comes up against the thick vapors of a mist of absurdity .... it is a Pauline world, except that God is removed into the impenetrable darkness and that there is no place for a mediator." (Cited in Politzer, 1966, p. 179.)

However, it is not as a commentator on life's absurdity or as a grim prophet of twentieth century civilization that Kafka will be considered here. Nor will attention be paid to his remarkable individualistic style which in a few lines creates an atmosphere of gloom and despair. His writing has been accurately described as the "objective depiction of absurdity" (Magny, 1946), and indeed Kafka meticulously details the objects of a world that makes no sense, that has no meaning. His intentional avoidance of describing scenery and locale lead to the uneasy realization that he is really writing about the landscape of the mind, and not of external space.

Cooperman (1966) accurately observes that Kafka may be appreciated on three levels: (1) the socio-materialist level, by which Kafka reflects the decay of prewar German culture, (2) the theological-mystical level, in which the meaning of the works can be seen as an existential search for grace which will not be achieved in a world without God, and (3) the psychological-rational level in which Kafka's writings reveal the struggles of a neurotic personality. One interpretation need not conflict with the others, as long as one does not try to reduce all levels to one, just as a study of his striking

literary style may be taken as a separate investigation in itself. Most but by no means all students of Kafka have focused on his theological or social meaning. Two exceptions are Edmund Wilson and Charles Neider. Wilson fails to see any great philosophical depth to Kafka's work, regarding the writings as a painful "realization of an emotional cul-de-sac" (1962, p. 96).[1] Neider (1948) believes he has found the key to Kafka in his discovery of alleged masculine and feminine symbols interspersed throughout the writings, and he uses these symbols to reconstruct Kafka's personality problems according to the method of early classical psychoanalysis.

It is my opinion that Kafka was acutely disturbed by existential philosophical questions and that these dilemmas are expressed in his works, especially the novels. However, for our present purposes, Kafka's gifts as a moralist and stylist will be left to students of philosophy and aesthetics. Here we shall be concerned with Kafka as a depressed, neurotic individual whose talent for writing and introspection allowed him to describe the inner world of depression with rare insight and power.

The external details of Kafka's life are relatively uneventful, except perhaps in the area of intimate relationships where the effects of his psychopathology may be discerned. As outlined in Brod's biography (1973), Franz was born in Prague on July 3, 1883. It is of psychological significance that his two younger brothers died in infancy and his younger siblings were

all girls. A second son was born in 1885 and survived only two years. A third son born in 1887 survived only one year. It may be speculated that Kafka's infancy was troubled not only by the usual loss of the mother's attention when a younger sib is born, but by an additional burden of familial sadness and despair at the deaths of these younger brothers. Kafka's mother gave birth to six children in nine years, so that even without the tragedy of the deaths of Kafka's brothers, the availability of the mother may be questioned. While we do not know the actual effect of these events on Kafka as a child, his later troubled relationships with women may indicate early difficulties with his mother.

In any event, Franz became the designated heir to the family business, and his father's future successor as well as predestined rival. The father Herman Kafka, through hard work, shrewdness, and force of character had risen from the level of proletariat to become a respected middle-class wholesale merchant. He was reported to be a giant of a man who was gruff, coarse, and autocratic both at home and at work. Franz's mother, in contrast, came from a family of Jewish scholars as well as dreamers and eccentrics. She was described as an intelligent and wise woman who, however, was quietly submissive before her husband. She worked daily in her husband's business and usually spent her evenings playing cards with him. There is not much evidence that she offered much support or solace to her children when they opposed their father. In the same letter cited earlier, Kafka compares her to a

beater during a hunt, forcing out the prey to be slaughtered by the powerful father. His diary entries include the following: “How furious I am with my mother. I need only begin to talk to her and I am irritated, almost scream” (written in 1913: Kafka, 1949) and, “Father from one side, mother from the other, have inevitably almost broken my spirit” (written in 1916: Kafka, 1949).

In childhood Franz was a pale, thin, sickly youngster given to scholarly pursuits. At the German University in Prague he finally decided on law although he would have preferred to study literature. According to Brod (1973), Kafka disliked the study of law but chose it because a legal degree allowed him the most options and the least dedication. He had already decided to become a writer and saw studying for the bar as eventually leading to a nondemanding way to earn a living while allowing time for literary pursuits. He duly obtained his degree of doctor juris in 1906, having already completed a number of stories and the greater part of a novel (which has been lost to posterity). Following a year’s internship in the law courts, he worked briefly for an Italian insurance company and then for the Workers’ Accident Insurance Institute until his retirement in 1920. Apparently he detested his work and tolerated it only because it gave him sufficient income to continue his writing. Much of the hopeless, sterile, gloomy atmosphere of his novels seems to be derived from his experience with the long, drawn-out insurance claims which he processed through endless series of bureaucratic

official levels.

On August 13, 1912, at the age of twenty-nine he met Felice Bauer, a young woman from Berlin who was visiting with friends. Kafka became immediately infatuated with her and one month later began an extensive correspondence that lasted five years. He twice became engaged to Felice and twice broke off the engagement. Shortly before the termination of their relationship, he was diagnosed as suffering from tuberculosis.

In 1919 he was briefly engaged to Julia Wohryzek, whom he met at a summer resort. It was the senior Kafka's objection to this union that prompted the famous "Letter To His Father." Kafka broke off the engagement and began a long, tempestuous relationship with another woman, carried out primarily by correspondence. This woman, Milena Jesenska, was married to an unfaithful, highly exploitative man who apparently exerted an uncanny power over his wife as well as over other women. During his "affair" with Milena, Kafka was in and out of various sanatoriums for his tuberculosis, so that while he and Milena wrote each other several letters a day, they actually saw little of each other. Kafka eventually broke off their relationship because she was unwilling to leave her husband for him. Milena was willing to live with Kafka for awhile but not to permanently sever her marital union. We do not know her reasons (although in her letters to Brod, she clearly demonstrates her anguish and guilt), but it may have been that Milena was

well aware that Kafka's remaining days of life were severely limited.

In the summer of 1923, while staying with his sister, Kafka met Dora Dymant, who at that time was about half Kafka's age. Dora was a rebellious and assertive girl who had escaped from a highly respected Orthodox Jewish family to support herself by servile work. Dora and Kafka moved to Berlin together, over both their families' objections. Despite Kafka's illness and their extreme poverty (due to the rampant inflation in Germany at the time), Kafka wrote Brod that for the first time he felt happy. Gradually his tuberculosis became more severe, and after stays in various sanatoriums, Kafka died on June 3, 1924 at the age of forty-one.

An ironic and yet somehow appropriate postscript to Kafka's life was Brod's discovery in 1948 that Kafka had fathered an illegitimate son. The child had lived only seven years and died before Kafka. Brod wrote that the child's mother, identified solely as M.M., had had only a brief relationship with Kafka which was followed by a lasting hostile alienation. The tragic aspect of Kafka's ignorance of the existence of this offspring is that, according to Brod, there was nothing Kafka more fervently desired than children. Brod wrote: "Fulfillment of this desire would have seemed to him a confirmation of his worth from the highest court of appeal" (1973, p. 240). Just as in one of Kafka's own stories, redemption exists, except that he who might be redeemed is not aware of it and thus is denied it.

These are the outward events of Kafka's life, and they are somewhat unremarkable, if not barren. If we wish to encounter Kafka's genius as well as his psychopathology, we must turn to his inner world. In fact, one must consider whether Kafka was more alive in his writing than in his actual day-to-day existence as a noncommital lover and steady civil servant.

One avenue of inquiry in Kafka's inner life is an ingenious study of his dreams conducted by Hall and Lind (1970). In his Diaries Kafka recorded 31 dreams, and six more in his letters to Milena, which he had from the ages of twenty-three to forty. Hall and Lind subjected these to a dream content analysis which had been standardized on 500 reported dreams of 100 male college students. From this careful scrutiny of the 37 recorded dreams of Kafka, the authors elicited a series of interesting themes. They found little aggression in Kafka's dreams and a paucity of success events. This finding coincides with other studies on the dreams of depressed individuals (see chapter 7), and forms part of an overall passivity. Other themes which stood out were a preoccupation with the body and its disfigurement and an emphasis on clothing and nakedness. There was also a marked degree of scoptophilia (sexual pleasure derived from looking or observing). Finally, the authors found ambivalence toward both men and women and a preponderance of masculinized female characters. In contrast to Kafka's fictional works, there was little evidence of guilt in the dreams.

From their analysis Hall and Lind concluded that the main determinants of Kafka's adult personality were his childhood fixations on his mother and on his own body. They wrote, "Rejection by the mother meant that he could not cope with the father nor could he establish a satisfying and permanent relationship with a woman. Rejection of his body resulted in neurasthenia and hypochondria and was one of the reasons for his becoming consumptive" (1970, p. 91). These authors are probably correct in detecting the primary roots of Kafka's psychopathology, but they do not follow the development of the distortions of his personality that occurred later in childhood, namely, Kafka's relationship with his father and with his peers.

Those few individuals who were close to Kafka could not help but discern his overwhelming emotional tie to his father. His intimate friend and biographer Max Brod explicitly wrote of the impact of the father figure on Kafka's life. "In how many talks did I not try and make clear to my friend" wrote Max Brod, "how he overestimated his father, and how stupid it is to despise oneself. It was all useless, the torrent of arguments that Kafka produced (when he didn't prefer, as he frequently did, to keep quiet) could really shatter and repel me for a moment" (1973, p. 23). Brod appears constantly to have had to stimulate Kafka to write and to keep up his morale. Throughout his biography there are frequent allusions to Kafka's self-denigration, his creative paralysis, and his continuous melancholy.

Brod wrote, “Still today I feel that the fundamental question, ‘What difference could his father’s approval make to Kafka?’ is put not from Kafka’s point of view but from an outsider’s. The fact that he did need it existed once and for all as an innate, irrefutable feeling, and its effects lasted to the end of his life as a general load of fear, weakness, and selfcontempt” (1973, p. 23).

If we wish to penetrate Kafka’s inner point of view and to understand his pathological tie to the dominant other from his internal vantage point, then we must turn to his writings where the conflict of the depressive often is so dramatically presented. From his autobiographical letter to his more symbolic works, the constant theme recurs: the realization of the brutality of authority, and, nonetheless, the hero’s (or antihero’s) need to grovel before and obey that authority.

In the letter to his father, Kafka realistically portrays his plight, recounting his early experiences and their lasting effect on his personality. The father is described as all-powerful and yet as critical, unfeeling, and crude. The father could tolerate no disagreement or show of strength in those around him, but then he disparaged the very weakness and submission he demanded and engendered. Kafka wrote: “From your arm chair you ruled the world. Your opinion was correct, every other was mad, wild, meshugge, not normal. Your self-confidence indeed was so great that you had no need to be consistent at all and yet never ceased to be in the right” (1973, p. 21). Kafka

even recognizes his father's selfish interests in his relationships with others, that to him, anyone else's autonomous desires were irrelevant: ". . . and it is characteristic that even today you really only encourage me in anything when you yourself are involved in it, when what is at stake is your own sense of self-importance . . . ." (1973, p. 19). Kafka fully realized the burden of guilt that accompanied daring to act without the internalized doctrines of giving all for the honor of the family and pleasure of the father. "In all my thinking I was, after all, under the heavy pressure of your personality, even in that part of it —and particularly in that which was not in accord with yours. All these thoughts, seemingly independent of you, were from the beginning burdened with your belittling judgments" (P. 23).

More and more quotations can be cited which demonstrate Kafka's awareness of his inability to obtain his father's blessing and his constant painful need of it. He hated himself for his emotional dependency, yet he could not imagine living without it. Kafka beautifully describes this dilemma in one of his paradoxical parables. "It is as if a person were a prisoner, and he had not only the intention to escape, which would perhaps be attainable, but also, indeed simultaneously, the intention to rebuild the prison as a pleasure dome for himself. But if he escapes, he cannot rebuild, and if he rebuilds, he cannot escape" (1973, p. 113). While Kafka included this passage in a discussion of his reasons for not being able to marry Julie, it is clear that Kafka had the knowledge that he must escape his psychological prison. Yet he was

simultaneously seized with the desire to reinstate himself as a prisoner, for he knew no other way to live than in relation to his father.

The long letter culminates in the reasons for Kafka's third renunciation of marriage: his father's suspicions of Kafka's intended and his ridicule of Kafka's reasons for desiring the girl, Kafka's own thoughts that marrying would mean becoming like his father and his concern that marriage would interfere with his writing. But there is more—Kafka felt that he could never face the responsibilities of marriage: "I tested myself not only when faced with marriage, but in the face of every trifle, you by your example and your method of upbringing convinced me, as I have tried to describe, of my incapacity and what turned out to be true of every trifle and proved you right, had to be fearfully true of the greatest thing of all: marriage" (1973, p. 121). Finally, Kafka alludes briefly to what may have been the most telling danger, that the father would break relations with him if he married: "I should flee him [Kafka's hypothetical son], emigrate, as you meant to do only because of my marriage" (1973, p. 117).

So much for Kafka's calm, reality-oriented recollections of his past. Perhaps a more accurate vision of his depressive conflict can be gained from his fictional creations which, although distorted, may like the distortions of dreams reveal a greater inner truth. For example, what he so persuasively and reasonably argued was his inability to marry in the letter written in 1919,

was boldly foretold in a dramatic story written seven years earlier. This work, whose title may be translated as either The Verdict or The Judgment, was penned in one furious eight-hour sitting two days after he sent his first letter to Felice Bauer, to whom the story is dedicated. This work has been singled out by Politzer (1966) as signifying a breakthrough in Kafka's writing; it was here that Kafka discovered his unique literary style which he continued to employ throughout all his later works.

The story opens with Georg, a young and successful merchant, who is writing to an old friend who has emigrated to Russia. The mysterious friend has fallen on hard times; he is sick, poor, and estranged in a foreign land without friends: "a man one could feel sorry for but not help." In contrast, since the friend's departure Georg's fortunes have greatly increased. He has taken over his aging father's business and multiplied it fivefold. He has even planned to marry, having become engaged a month earlier to Frieda Brandenfeld, a girl from a well-to-do family (much like her real life counterpart). The contrast between Georg and his emigre friend is highlighted in a conversation that Georg recalls having had with Frieda, in which he informs her that he cannot invite his friend to their wedding. The friend would be hurt and discontented by the disparity in their life circumstances, "and without being able to do anything about his discontent he'd have to go away again alone." "Alone —do you know what that means?" asks Georg. Finally Georg informs his friend of the impending marriage at the

end of the letter he has been writing. Georg then enters his widowed father's darkened room. Although the father is old and apparently ill, Georg remarks to himself, "My father is still a giant of a man." Immediately they begin discussing the friend in Russia. After Georg recounts his thoughts of inviting the friend to the wedding, the father after a long preamble asks "Do you really have this friend in St. Petersburg?" Georg reassures him with, "Never mind my friends. A thousand friends wouldn't make up to me for my father." But old man persists, he tells Georg that there is no such friend in Russia. Georg again reassures the father, tenderly carries him to bed, and gently tucks him in.

Suddenly the father springs from the bed, throwing the covers off. "You wanted to cover me up," he shouts reproachfully, "but I'm far from being covered up yet. And even if this is the last strength I have, it's enough for you, too much for you. Of course I know your friend. He would have been a son after my own heart." The father's numerous reproaches then turn to his son's ingratitude for allowing himself to plan realistically to marry.

During this tirade, Georg begins to fantasize about his friend in Russia, alone in a barren warehouse. "Why did he have to go so far away?" he thinks. But the father interrupts his reverie. "Attend to me," he commands. He continues his attack: "Because she lifted her skirts like this and this you made up to her, and in order to make free with her undisturbed you disgraced your

mother's memory, betrayed your friend, and stuck your father into bed so that he can't move." Georg shrinks back in the face of this barrage. "But your friend hasn't been betrayed after all," cries the father, "I've been representing him here on the spot."

The tables have turned completely. The feeble old man that Georg carried to bed has risen into a giant. He brags to Georg that he could sweep Frieda from Georg's side if he so desired. Then comes the final twist: the now omnipotent father tells Georg that he has been in touch with the friend in Russia all along, and the friend prefers the father's letters to those of Georg: "In his [the friend's] left hand he crumples your letters unopened, while in his right he holds up my letters to read through," shouts the old man.

The father continues his condemnation of Georg. "So now you know what else there was in the world beside yourself, till now you've known only about yourself! An innocent child, yes, that you were truly, but still more truly have you been a devilish human being! And therefore take note: I sentence you now to death by drowning!" At these words, Georg dashes from the room, driven toward the water. Hanging from a bridge, he utters, "Dear parents, I have always loved you, all the same," and drops to his death, carrying out his father's sentence.

What is one to make of this grotesque story, especially since it was

apparently written in a passionate fury after Kafka had decided to initiate his first real love affair? In his diaries Kafka wrote that the friend was the pivotal character, uniting all the others who are to be seen in relation to him (Brand, 1976). Indeed, the friend appears to be the liberated Kafka, the self that he pictured himself to be without his father. The friend is free, but he is also impoverished, sick, and a failure. Georg— the superficial Kafka—is successful, self-content, and about to be married; but as the story later makes clear, he is also a child, deluding himself about his social success. The father makes him aware of his selfish dependency and plainly states that he would have preferred the friend as a son. Finally the father after a series of rebukes sentences Kafka to death for his weakness, his self-centeredness, and his immaturity; and Kafka accepts the verdict.

The Judgment has attracted the attention of a number of students of psychology. Each finds his own particular meaning, and yet all agree on the son's overriding dependency on the father for his own self-evaluation. Becker (1969) wrote a semicommentary on the story, analyzing it almost paragraph by paragraph, and he ultimately used the story to illustrate his own thoughts on the Oedipal conflict. Becker believes that overcoming the Oedipal complex really means becoming a person in one's own right. Since George has failed in this task, Becker concludes, "he has literally not been able to be born into manhood; and so he must die" (1969, p. 68). Becker sees the father's judgment as proof of Georg's lack of personal individuation, "the parental

appraisal of the child's personality is itself a command; the parent's opinion becomes the child's life will" (P. 68).

Indeed, the story seems to illustrate Kafka's inability to free himself from the father or from the family's beliefs. *The Judgment* offers Kafka a choice between two modes of life, each unsatisfactory. He cannot retain a social facade after the father has revealed the weakness, parasitism, and egotism of this role. Yet to free himself might mean to become like the friend —alone, sick, impoverished, an exile in a foreign land. Because he lacks the courage of the latter choice, he accepts the father's judgment that he does not deserve to live. Kafka's own diary entries closely support this interpretation.

> The friend is the link between father and son, he is the greatest thing they have in common. Sitting alone at the window, Georg takes a sensual pleasure in rooting about in the common possession, believes he has his father in himself and, but for a fleeting, sad hesitation, considers everything is peaceful (1949).

Kafka's curious phrase about Georg having the father in himself so that everything is peaceful, may indicate Georg's belief that he has overcome the dominant other, that he has internalized his own value structure, so he is free to consider marriage, run a business, become prosperous, and—most important—attain maturity. All of this confident serenity is eventually disrupted as the father reassumes his commanding position. Kafka's diary entry continues, indicating that in reality Georg has no real identity, "and it is

merely because he himself has nothing, else the sight of his father, that the verdict that shuts his father off from him completely has such a powerful effect on him." Kafka appears to be saying that the father is able to control Georg because the father is all that Georg has.

However, it should be noted that Kafka wrote this story after he had decided to initiate his first romance. The Judgment obviously prophesizes his inability to marry Felice, and yet he dedicated the story to her. His conflict over beginning a love affair must in some manner have served as the story's stimulus.

Brand (1976) in fact interprets the story as a renunciation of marriage and a dedication by Kafka to live the life of an ascetic, solitary artist. For Brand, the friend is the inner Kafka—the exile, the writer, and the bachelor—while Georg is Kafka's facade of bourgeois bliss and self-deceiving hypocrisy. According to Brand, in The Judgment Kafka kills his mundane self but gives birth to his artistic mastery. It is as if meeting Felice had upset his ideal of a bachelor purity, which the story sets right. Certainly the two characters are polar opposites and they may represent disparate aspects of Kafka's personality. What may be considered characteristically neurotic is Kafka's belief that the two aspects cannot be integrated. He must be a lonely outsider, an outcast, or he must be a self-indulgent, childlike burgher. However, it should be pointed out that Kafka chooses to have the father reveal Georg's

hypocrisy, prevent his wish of marriage to materialize, and ultimately sentence him to death. Seen in this light, Kafka may be saying that his father's constant belittling, as revealed in the letter, made him feel too incapable or guilty to dare aspire to a normal, fulfilling life. Rather, Kafka resorts to the romanticized existence of the pure artist because he cannot face the responsibilities and the pleasures of human commitment. It appears that Kafka is creating a virtue out of an inherent deficiency.

In a diary entry of July 21, 1913, Kafka listed seven points for and against marriage to Felice. The entry closes with "Miserable me!" and, "What misery" written in large letters. Briefly, the seven points consist of: his inability to live alone, yet his not understanding how to live with someone else; his becoming frightened when he hears that married men are happy; his being able to accomplish something only when alone; his fear of being tied to anyone, of overflowing into another personality; his fears that other distractions would interfere with his writing which had become his only means of open self-expression.

This list of arguments for and against marriage has been taken as evidence of Kafka's holy dedication to literature. However, it may also indicate his inability to communicate (except through his writing), his fear of responsibility, and ultimately his fear of earthly pleasure. Writing may have been Kafka's salvation, but it was salvation at the cost of an active

participation in life. His self-imposed taboos against actual gratification and his fear of the responsibility and closeness of a true relationship appear to have been the limiting factors in his life, rather than his all-consuming devotion to writing. The romanticized notion of giving up marriage for art was only a rationalization. Rather, his fear of failing at marriage forced him further into art where, free of guilt and responsibility to others, he could feel himself truly liberated. Yet even in his writing he constantly returned to the same themes: the irony of life, the helplessness of the individual in the face of public humiliation, the awesome power of authority. Brilliant as it is, his work is an obsessive outpouring of inner turmoil and repeated self-hatred. As Hall and Lind (1970) observed, "Kafka's demons were purged not on the psychoanalytic couch but by the relentless, clear-eyed explorations of the nethermost limits of his being" (P. 94). It is a final irony that Kafka's one alleged area of freedom appears not to have escaped the prison of the father's early restraints. As he finally admits in his fateful letter to his father, "My writing was all about you; all I did there, after all, was to bemoan what I could not bemoan upon your breast" (1973). So much for Kafka's liberation through art.

Kafka's own realization that the perpetuation of his childhood self into his adult years prevented his fulfillment as a mature human being appears to have been the theme for a later story, *A Country Doctor*. In this brief work, a doctor is called to attend to a sick boy during a thick blizzard. At first the

doctor cannot go because his horse has died of exposure, but then a mysterious groom, a gruff, burly, licentious man, appears with two powerful horses. The doctor is instantly transported to his patient ten miles away, leaving his servant girl Rose at the mercy of the amorous groom. In the sickroom the doctor examines the child and finds nothing wrong, complaining that he has once again been called out needlessly. As he is about to leave, however, the sister of the patient flutters a blood-soaked towel (as the mother bites her lips with tears in her eyes and the father sniffs a glass of rum), which convinces the doctor to take a second look at his patient. This time the doctor discovers a horrible wound full of blood-spotted worms. At this point Kafka writes: "Poor boy, you were past helping. I had discovered your great wound; this blossom in your side was destroying you. The family was pleased" (1971, p. 223). The doctor now realizes that the boy has no chance of recovery. Nevertheless, he allows the villagers to act out some ancient folk custom: the doctor is stripped and put into bed with the patient, where the two of them are left by themselves. When alone with the doctor, the young boy tells him, "Do you know, I have very little confidence in you. Why, you were only blown in here, you didn't come on your own feet. Instead of helping me, you're cramping me on my death bed. What I'd like best is to scratch your eyes out." The doctor replies: "Right, it is a shame, and yet I am a doctor. What else am I to do? Believe me, it is not easy for me either." The boy then retorts, "Am I supposed to be content with this apology? Oh I must be, I

can't help it. I have always had to put up with tilings. A fine wound is all I brought in the world; that was my sole endowment." The doctor reassures the patient that his wound is not so bad; that many an individual offers his side to an ax and does not receive such a fine wound. But now the doctor is thinking of escape. He surreptitiously leaves, naked, unable to get into his coat. However, now the horses scarcely move through the freezing snow. The story ends with the doctor unsuccessfully trying to get home:

> Never shall I reach home at this rate ... in my house the disgusting groom is raging, Rose is his victim; I do not want to think about it anymore. Naked, exposed to the frost of the most unhappy of ages, with an earthy vehicle, unearthly horses, old man that I am, I wander astray . . . Betrayed! Betrayed! A false alarm on the night bell once answered—it cannot be made good, not ever (1971, p. 225).

A Country Doctor may partially be understood as Kafka the doctor-adult vainly attempting to cure Kafka the child-patient. All that he accomplishes by his efforts is to sacrifice Rose and to end up naked and cold in the midst of a blizzard behind two horses who refuse to move. The story ends with the prophetic words, "it cannot be made good, not ever." But what of the child patient? On first sight he seems well, but his sister knows that he is not well. On closer inspection the boy has an incurable, horrible wound which he calls his "sole endowment." The boy accepts his wound, realizes the pathetic helplessness of the doctor, and resigns himself to his fate. The only help the doctor can give is to tell the boy he should be proud of his wound. I believe

that the interchange between doctor and child demonstrates Kafka's refusal of help from others (he was familiar with psychoanalysis but ridiculed it) and the turning of his psychic deformity into a badge of honor, the badge of a victim. At the same time he seems to be saying that his persistent attention to his former sick and childish self is robbing him of satisfying adult experiences. Not only is he unable to cure the child, but in the sham process of cure he loses everything.

As telling as *A Country Doctor* may be of Kafka's sense of self as a sick child and helpless adult, if we wish fully to realize Kafka's own view of his role within his family and the intensity of the self-loathing that his familial relationship engendered in him, then we should turn to his classic, *The Metamorphosis*, written in the same year as *The Judgment*. This novella opens with the startling sentence, "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" (1971, p. 89).[2] By beginning the story with the metamorphosis already accomplished, Kafka gives his main protagonist no choice: he already is a repulsive bug. The story deals with how Gregor as well as others react to this transformation, which is taken as a given. As with most of Kafka's works, the narrative is a painful process of public humiliation and externally inflicted pain. The plot is fairly simple: the giant bug (which retains its prior human sensitivity and consciousness) is imprisoned in its bedroom and at first tolerated. Later, on an excursion into the family parlor, the bug is pelted with

apples by the father. One of the apples sticks in his back, causing an infection. The metamorphosized Gregor gradually loses his appetite and strength, and eventually his will to live. The night before his death, Gregor hears his sister playing her violin for three boarders whom the family has been forced to take in. He approaches the group and is discovered, at which time the boarders give notice. Gregor lamely and slowly returns to his room while his family openly states that they wish they could be rid of him. The next day his body is discovered by the charwoman, who unceremoniously discards his remains. Gregor's father, mother, and sister take the day off from work to celebrate their new freedom. In contrast to the dark, interior atmosphere of the story, this last scene is filled with sunlight and joviality.

Behind the simple plot outline are an infinity of subtle and insightful revelations about the Samsa family and the psychological role of the son-insect (as well as the status of a middle-class salesman in pre-war Germany and, possibly, the alienated state of modern man). For example, Gregor's first reaction on discovering his grotesque metamorphosis is not appropriate horror, but rather concern that he will be late for work. Throughout the story Gregor appears incredibly naive about his repulsive appearance. This insistent naivete may be a key to the story's psychological meaning. It is as if Kafka were showing that his protagonist does not understand how his presence offends and disgusts others; yet by the behavior of these others, Kafka has deliberately indicated how offensive and disgusting his hero is.

Gregor appears to be pleading for human acceptance, even though he has become a gigantic insect which no longer can communicate with those around him. Gregor's painful situation is made all the more pathetic in that there is never any danger from the large bug; the others recoil from him out of revulsion, not out of fear. Finally, Kafka never gives a reason for the tragic metamorphosis. It is not Gregor's fault that this disaster has befallen him. However, it is impossible for others to accept him; he is grotesque, an embarrassment to the family, and must be eradicated and forgotten. He who once supported the family has become its terrible burden. Few works in fiction convey the sense of helplessness, self-loathing, and rejection as well as *The Metamorphosis*.

Two other transformations occur concurrently with Gregor's deterioration, and both are significant for the story and for its psychological meaning. As Gregor becomes more feeble and helpless, his father gains in strength and dignity. At the beginning the father is retired, old, and weak; at the end he is employed, rejuvenated, and a tower of strength. Here, once again, is the inverse relationship between father and son: the father gains strength at the expense of the son, and ultimately destroys the son.

However, the major transformation occurs in the sister. She initially is sympathetic toward Gregor, bringing him an assortment of food and being the only one who will enter his room. The reader is also informed that prior to his

metamorphosis, Gregor had a special relationship with her, "With his sister alone had he remained intimate, and it was a secret plan of his that she, who loved music . . . should be sent next year to study at the Conservatorium, despite the great expense that would entail . . . ." (1971, p. 111). As the story progresses, the sister becomes alienated and then openly hostile to Gregor, finally suggesting he be disposed of. The turning point of the story appears to be the scene in which Gregor hears his sister playing the violin and, attracted by the music, dares to approach the parlor where he is spotted by one of the lodgers. During this episode, Kafka allows Gregor to confess his feelings about his sister:

> Gregor crawled a little farther and lowered his head to the ground so that it might be possible for his eves to meet hers. Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him? He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved. He was determined to push forward till he reached his sister, to pull at her skirt and so let her know that she was to come into his room with her violin, for no one here appreciated her playing as he would appreciate it. He would never let her out of his room, at least not so long as he lived; his frightful appearance would become, for the first time, useful to him; he would watch all the doors of his room at once and spit at intruders; but his sister should need no constraint, she should stay with him of her own free will, she should sit beside him on the sofa, bend down her ear to him, and hear him confide that he had the firm intention of sending her to the Conservatorium .... After this confession his sister would be so touched that she would burst into tears, and Gregor would raise himself to her shoulder and kiss her on the neck which, now that she went to business, she kept free of any ribbon or collar (1971, pp. 130-131).

Immediately after this last tender sentiment, Gregor is discovered by

the lodger, which precipitates the final stage in the sister's transformation of feelings. It is now she who insists that Gregor be gotten rid of in some way. All this follows Gregor's ludicrous, yet poignant fantasy that his sister would allow herself to be kissed on the neck by a gigantic insect. I will not dare to venture into a discussion of the possible incestual or sexual allusions of this scene. It is sufficient to note that years later Kafka called the story an indiscretion and asked facetiously, "Is it perhaps delicate and discreet to talk about the bedbugs in one's own family?" (Politzer, 1966, p. 74.)

Of greater importance is that the story was written at the time of his sister Valli's engagement in September 1912. Kafka noted this event in his diary on September 15, and added, "Love between brother and sister—the repetition of love between mother and father" (Politzer, 1966, p. 74). However, rather than seeking a sexual motive behind the story, it might be that Kafka was writing about the loss of an emotionally intimate relationship, the loss of his sister's love to her fiance. As such, the story seems to represent Kafka's further abandonment by someone whom he hoped would care for him and, childishly, stay with him forever of her own free will. Here is juxtaposed a domineering, possessive attitude toward others as well as the knowledge that one's own repugnant qualities must drive others away. Gregor's tragedy is not simply that he has become transformed into a disgusting insect, but that he still expects others to treat him as a human being. Indeed, he has more than an ordinary human need for regard in that he

expects unilateral lifelong devotion. The story may reflect Kafka's sense that the loss of his sister was a betrayal; yet at the same time he portrays his hero as being so repulsive that he cannot be loved. Here is the familiar depressive theme: one feels himself to be so base that he cannot be loved, while at the same time he naively hopes for an all-giving love that knows no bounds. Kafka artfully portrays what so many depressives describe in more pedestrian ways, that they must connive, bribe, or cheat to control the loved other because they cannot be loved for themselves. The huge, helpless, and doomed bug, wounded by the father, ignored by the mother, and rejected by the sister, may well represent Kafka's depressed self-image of a hopelessly repulsive being whose feelings were not acknowledged and who was hidden away as the family's shame.

Another illustration will be given to show Kafka's ultimate agreement with his father's low estimation of him and his willingness to go along with his father's condemnation at the expense of life itself. This time I refer to *In the Penal Colony*, perhaps the most terrifying short work in modern fiction, which Kafka wrote in 1914. This is an almost surrealistic work, taking place in some unspecified tropical prison. The entire action revolves around a specific piece of apparatus that was used to execute prisoners during the days when the recently deceased commandant of the prison was in charge. An officer is demonstrating this torture machine to some important explorer, while nostalgically reminiscing of the days when the former stern commandant was

still alive and executions were staged in a grand manner with ladies, children, and the entire penal staff in attendance. The officer complains that the new commandant does not appreciate this form of execution and the machine has gradually deteriorated and is in a state of disrepair. Gradually we learn that the former commandant had personally designed the machine and this officer had been his first assistant in all penal matters. “My guiding principle is this,” explains the officer, “Guilt is never to be doubted.”

Interspersed with these revelations is a meticulous explanation of how the machine works. We also learn that it will be demonstrated to the explorer with an allegedly disobedient servant. The description of the machine is made all the more horrible in that its torturing and inhuman aspects are presented in a matter-of-fact, even proud manner by the officer. The lengthy description seems prophetic of the Nazis’ meticulous accounting of atrocities in the extermination camps (where, in fact, Kafka’s three sisters were to perish), as if the list were enumerating exchanges of merchandise for a shipping company. Briefly, the monstrous machine operates by slowly rotating its encased victim as a complicated system of innumerable needles inscribes a message on the penitent man, who is supposed to decipher the message by his wounds. When the officer tries out the machine on the condemned servant, it breaks down and in a cacophony of needles, cogwheels, and levers seems to be falling apart. The officer removes the intended victim and, stripping himself naked, takes the victim’s place in the machine. He is willing

to die along with the demise of the machine, which he does, with a spike through his forehead as the machine finally collapses.

The explorer, who has been repelled by everything that has transpired, goes to the colony teahouse and he learns that the old commandant is buried there because the priest would not allow him to lie in the holy ground of the church yard. He is shown a stone which marks the grave of the commandant, and on it is inscribed, in part, "there is a prophecy that after a certain number of years the Commandant will rise again and lead his adherents from this house to recover the colony. Have faith and wait." The explorer reads the inscription, hurries to a boat to be taken off the colony, and prevents others from joining him.

Although it is written in clear, distinct, and almost journalistic prose, *In the Penal Colony* reads like a narrative of a nightmare. In this work, the characters and the objects are more symbolic than in the previously cited stories. The story is a parable of the need to obey a harsh, brutal authority and to perish with the remains of that authority (the machine) when the rigid moralistic system is jeopardized. We may speculate that the officer represents the aspect of Kafka which was tied to the autocratic dictates of his father (the former commandant) and which would heed his dictates even after the latter's death. It becomes evident that the machine, and all it stands for, is the reason for the officer's existence. Without it, life would have no

purpose, and so he gruesomely sacrifices himself when the machine breaks down. Again the individual cannot escape his prison but finds meaning only in being a prisoner to the old system. Finally Kafka warns us that the old commandant is not really dead but may return. “Have faith and wait,” ends the inscription.

With each story, we find Kafka going to a deeper layer of symbolism and turning further away from external reality to express his inner conflicts. Because of his ability to coalesce his primal symbolism with a clarity and sense of proportion that can be related to by others, he strikes a chord in his readers. It is in this capacity that Kafka is a literary genius rather than a nagging, complaining melancholic.

Therefore we may learn much about depression from Kafka in that he so eloquently expresses the turmoil that most patients can articulate only partially. Throughout his stories Kafka is the eternal defendant, ever on trial although always knowing that the verdict will be guilty. The judge is always the same, the father. It is as if the rest of the world did not exist, only the judge-father and the defendant—son. Here is blatant evidence of the overwhelming and pervasive power of the dominant other on the depressive. Even his writing, which some critics believe to have been his salvation against the domination of the father, did not escape the latter’s influence. In the letter to his father, Kafka confesses “My writing was all about you” (1973).

Another aspect of the depressive character that Kafka's writing exemplifies is the self-hatred for not living up to the standards of the powerful other. Kafka always accepted the father's judgment that he was weak and submissive. At the same time, Kafka fully realized that to have acted otherwise, to have been assertive or independent, would have brought punishment from the same father. This is essentially a no win situation: the child is forced to be dependent and then reproached for his dependency. Eventually the individual cannot break away, even when life circumstances allow him to do so. *In the Penal Colony* horribly demonstrates how Kafka continued his self-inhibition and slavish devotion to the brutal patriarchal authority even after that authority had ceased to exist. The self-loathing for being what his father made him, yet his inability to be anything else, may account for Kafka's frequent use of death or suicide as the sole solution of his protagonists to their dilemma.

His stories are also instructive in terms of depressive psychopathology because they show how the individual later in life magnifies and distorts the childhood dominant other. It is doubtful that the senior Kafka could have been as sadistic and terrifying as the old commandant who invented the terrible death machine. Yet Kafka, like so many depressed individuals, inflated the dread and power of the dominant other. He never seemed capable of seeing the father as only another human being; rather, he retained the childhood image of the all-powerful patriarch, with the distortions of

childhood cognition.

Janouch (1953) recounted an illustrative instance of Kafka's inability to alter his view of his father, even as an adult. One day Janouch and Kafka happened to walk past the father's place of business. The elder Kafka emerged and shouted to his sickly son, "Franz, go home. The air is damp!" Kafka appeared to ignore his father and commented to Janouch, "My father, he is anxious about me. Love often wears the face of violence" (p. 31). In this last phrase, Kafka exhibited his refusal to allow his father to be anything but a tyrant. It is almost as if Kafka needed this view of the father to justify his own self-imposed martyrdom—his self-pity, his self-hatred, and ultimately his self-destruction.

Brod described Kafka's everyday existence as a constant fight against depression as well as a perverse glorification in suffering. "Indeed he sometimes lived for months in a kind of lethargy, in utter despair, in my diary I find note after note on his sadness" (1973, p. 104). Yet somehow Brod believed that despite Kafka's sad heart, his spirit was so gay that he had a stimulating effect on others. His concrete examples do not bear this out, unless one considers ironic comment and sarcastic reflection to be a "gay spirit."

There is also the sense of helplessness in Kafka's works; one is caught in

circumstances which he cannot control, but which he must obey because he is basically guilty—guilty for living the life of a weak parasite. Kafka's characters have no will of their own, they live an existence that is reactive to the wishes of authority. As in *The Judgment*, to dare to exert one's autonomy is to live a bleak, impoverished, and sickly existence. The barrenness of Russia, where the friend is in self-imposed exile, may represent the barrenness of emotional life away from the needed father. Along with the sense of helplessness is a knowledge that there is no hope of change. The character is caught in a hopeless situation as a huge insect that is unable to change on its own, and whom others refuse to help.

These elements combine to inhibit the individual continuously from leading an authentic or fulfilling life. Kafka stayed in a job he hated. He broke off engagements three times. He remained within the family orbit until shortly before his death. Even his writing did not really free him. He published little in his life and asked his closest friend, Max Brod, to burn all his manuscripts upon his death. The writings themselves are not only gloomy, they have a sense of suffocation, of endless futile repetition, in which nothing can be accomplished and nothing can be enjoyed. Everything is complex, musty, convoluted, oppressive, moralistic, stifling.

Finally, one must also appreciate the effect of Kafka on others. In his self-absorption, he appears to have been oblivious to the suffering he may

have imposed on others. Brod's biography is exceptionally laudatory and in fact almost reverent, and so downplays Kafka's effects on others.[3] However, Kafka appears to have twice broken his engagement with Felice and kept her in a hopeless relationship for five years. Actually, she married shortly after the last break. He repeated this behavior with Julie and Milena a few years later.

Anyone who reads the tormented letters that Milena wrote to Brod following Kafka's rejection of her can appreciate his destructive effect. She was made to feel guilty because Kafka broke with her. Consider the following excerpt:

> I want to know whether I am the kind of person who has made Frank suffer the way he has suffered from every other woman, so that his sickness has grown worse, so that he has to flee from me, too, in his fear, and so that I too must get out of his life—whether I am at fault or whether it is a consequence of his own nature. Is what I am saying clear? I *must* know that (Cited in Brod: 1973, p. 232).

Here the contagion of guilt has contaminated Milena to the point that she questions her role in Kafka's consumption.

Fortunately she regained her objectivity and a while later was able to write "What his terror is, I know down to the last nerve. It existed before he met me, all the while he did not know me .... I know for certain that no sanatorium will succeed in curing him. He will never become well, Max, as

long as he has this terror" (Cited in Brod: 1973, p. 233). Eventually Milena identifies this terror as one of the flesh, of love, and of life.

Kafka appears to have been disinterested in politics or in the actual changes of the world around him. His universe seemed restricted to himself, his suffering, and his father. As with so many depressive characters, his obsession with himself and his inner needs prevented him from fully appreciating the needs of others as well as the existence of a world beyond the circumscribed universe of his own pain. Kafka distinguishes himself by his ability to describe his plight and by showing an amazing insight into his condition and its causes. His writing may have been a catharsis and a penetrating self-analysis, but it was not a cure. At the age of thirty-six, only five years before his death, Kafka confessed the narrowness of his existence by writing to his father "And so, if the world consisted only of me and you (a notion I was much inclined to have), then this purity of the world came to an end with you and, by virtue of your advice, the filth began with me. In itself it was, of course, incomprehensible that you should thus condemn me, only old guilt, and profoundest contempt on your side, could explain it to me. And so I was seized in my innermost being and very hard indeed" (1973, p. 105).

One year before his death, Kafka appears to have been able to break this filial bond. He moved to Berlin with Dora Dymant and led a fairly independent and even happy existence. Perhaps it was his realization that death was near

that freed Kafka from his father. Or it may have been that he found in Dora the total love that he seems to have required. While Brod (1973) portrays these final months as idyllic and happy, Kafka's last works do not entirely justify this sanguine evaluation. His final stories appear to deal with the role of the artist in society and society's acceptance of aesthetics. He must have known he was near his end and these final works represented a sort of taking stock of his life. Despite the change in theme, they still contain Kafka's irony and his bitterness, as well as his stylistic brilliance. The most important of these last stories may be *The Hunger Artist*, which can be taken as Kafka's testament and final self-assessment.

As with his earlier stories, the plot outline is extremely simple, with complex underlying psychological twists and meanings. The main character is a "hunger artist," a person who starves in public as a carnival attraction. The hunger artist is housed in a cage with relays of permanent watchers who see to it that he does not cheat (although this latter restraint is actually a formality, since any professional hunger artist would honor the code of his calling). In previous years, we are told, great crowds would gather to observe as individuals starved themselves. On the fortieth day of the fast, the flower-bedecked cage is opened, a military band plays, and doctors examine the hunger artist, relaying their findings to the enthusiastic crowd. Finally two young ladies, especially chosen for the honor, lead the frail skeleton-thin artist from the cage to a table where he has to be enticed to break his long fast

amid tumultuous cheers.

Kafka wrote, “So he lived for many years, with small regular intervals of recuperation, in visible glory, honored by the world, yet in spite of that troubled in spirit, and all the more troubled because no one would take his trouble seriously” (1971, p. 272). The hunger artist is melancholic because, despite his worldly success, he is misunderstood. His art of fasting has been perverted into a commercial venture such as with the sale of photographs showing how he would appear on the fortieth day. The public did not understand that fasting was indeed an art, that he could go on beyond the forty days, and that he enjoyed it.

However, such conflicts were in the past. In recent years public interest in professional fasting had waned. People no longer appreciated self-starvation. The hunger artist, who had been cheered by thousands as a main attraction, had now hired himself to a circus where customers barely paused by his cage on their way to view the animal menagerie. In addition to his flagging public, he had to suffer the stench and sounds of the nearby animals. He was merely an impediment on the way to the menagerie. “He might fast as much as he could, and he did so, but nothing could save him now, people passed him by. Just try to explain to anyone the art of fasting! Anyone who has no feeling for it cannot be made to understand it” (1971, p. 276).

The hunger artist is gradually ignored by everyone, until he is completely forgotten by the circus-goers. Finally the circus overseer, coming upon a seemingly empty cage filled with dirty straw, discovers the dying hunger artist quite by accident. The surprised overseer asks “Are you still fasting? When on earth do you mean to stop?” The hunger artist replies in a whisper “Forgive me, everybody.” The overseer, believing him crazed with hunger and fatigue, humors him and responds “We forgive you.”

At this point Kafka clarifies the psychological meaning of the story, revealing the motives of the hunger artist:

> “I always wanted you to admire my fasting” said the hunger artist. “We do admire it” said the overseer, affably. “But you shouldn’t admire it,” said the hunger artist. “Well then we don’t admire it” said the overseer, “but why shouldn’t we admire it?” “Because I have to fast, I can’t help it” said the hunger artist. “What a fellow you are,” said the overseer, “and why can’t you help it?” .... “because I couldn’t find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.” These were his last words, but in his dimming eyes remained the firm though no longer proud persuasion that he was still continuing to fast. (1971, pp. 276-277).

The story ends with a young, healthy panther taking over the hunger artist’s cage and to the delight of all, eating heartily. In contrast to the self-denying artist, Kafka describes the panther as having “a noble body, furnished almost to the bursting point with all it needed.” The panther “seemed to carry freedom around with it” and “the joy of life streamed” from it “with ardent

passion."

The final juxtaposition of the panther, who appears to be the affirmation of life, serves to accentuate further the hunger artist's long history of self-denial. Again Kafka utilizes the theme of painful public humiliation, the futile suicide of the main character, and a harrowing examination of suffering. As in his story of In the Penal Colony, we are reminded that people no longer appreciate the spectre of pain or stem morality. However, in contrast to that work, the punishment here is not meted out by an external torture machine but is self-induced. Indeed, the hunger artist willingly fasts and proudly displays his self-affliction. Here it appears the older Kafka is acknowledging that the reasons for his refusal to embrace life rest within himself. He did it, says the hunger artist, for the admiration of others and yet he admonishes others from admiring him. At the end of life he seems to be saying that it wasn't really worth it. He has become the ascetic exile of *The Judgment*; he has denied himself the joy of a full existence, and it was not worth it. He ends up forgotten, an impediment on the way to the circus animals, discovered by chance.

But there is more: the hunger artist admits that he has fasted and is dying because no food was to his liking. He could find no suitable nourishment in this life and so he prefers to abstain from life. In true depressive fashion he cannot enjoy anything; he cannot allow himself to live

except in self-denial. What others might have admired as a great feat of self-sacrifice or iron discipline was, for the hunger artist, actually quite easy. He could not help but fast for there was no earthly food that satisfied him. He expects more than a normal life could supply.

If we trace Kafka's fiction from *The Judgment* to *The Hunger Artist*, we see that the gradual development of the depressive is revealed. At first, he is denied life by the father who refuses to allow his son any sense of dignity or autonomy. In *The Metamorphosis*, the hero begins his social exile; and betrayed by the sister, as an insect among humans, he furthers his retreat from life. In the infernal machine of *In the Penal Colony*, he reaffirms his slavish devotion to the old harsh morality, even after the father commandant can no longer demand it. *The Country Doctor* shows us that his failure to accept the responsibilities of a full adult life is the result of his perpetuation within himself of his childhood self, described as sick, deformed, incurable. Finally, in *The Hunger Artist*, Kafka appears to look back on his life as a man who voluntarily refused to live it.

In reviewing the actual life of Kafka as reported in his biography and as revealed by himself in his writings, one finds the psychodynamic aspects of the depressive character. The relationship with the dominant other, the inhibition of autonomous gratification, the self-blame, the sense of helplessness, and the lack of effective assertion are all there. For the student

of psychiatry, Kafka's works permit a rare and unforgettable glimpse into the inner world of melancholia.

Notes

[1] Wilson concludes: "In Kafka's case, it was he who cheated and never lived to get his own back. What he has left us is the half-expressed gasp of a self-doubting soul trampled under. I do not see how one can possibly take him for either a great artist or moral guide" (1962, p. 97).

[2] Kafka never divulges what type of bug he is describing. The German word he uses is *Ungeziefer,* which may be literally translated as vermin.

[3] Neider (1948) accurately criticizes Brod's biography as failing to "understand the masochistic implications of a severe neurosis" (P. 12). Brod contradicts himself first by denying Kafka's pathology and then by excusing Kafka's behavior on the basis of his being plagued by psychological problems.

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