Breaking the Ice, Freezing the Laughter

Authorial Empathy, Reader Response, and the Kafkaesque Poetics of Guilt and Shame

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This article explores the process of writing emotions through the lens of rhetorical approaches to narrative. It specifically focuses on one aspect of authorial empathy that so far has gained relatively little attention, namely, the process of writing negative emotions such as guilt and shame.[1] The concept of "authorial empathy" is used in this article to refer to the narrative imagination that guides an author's writing practices, i.e. the choices of narrative techniques intended to evoke certain emotional responses in readers. The first part of the article outlines a theoretical and methodological approach that takes into account all three aspects of narrative empathizing: not only the author's emotions but also the readers' emotions and the rhetorical, textual strategies the author uses (more or less consciously) to evoke emotional responses in the reading audience.[2] In examining the rhetorical triangle that involves authorial empathy, this article discusses narrative progression, aesthetic distance and other elements that influence the artistic production of emotions and emotion effects.

After this short introduction to the theoretical framework, Franz Kafka's short stories will be used to illustrate the ambivalent uses of authorial empathy. Kafka's purpose – to generate a disturbed reaction in his readers – is manifested in a famous letter to Oskar Pollak, written in January 1904:

1 Cf. Hogan 2011, Tenenbaum 2009, Friedländer 2013.

2 Cf. Phelan 2005.

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we are reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? [...] we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.[3]

This article examines how certain of the rhetorical devices Kafka used travel from text to text, and how these devices are connected to the process of writing the emotions of guilt and shame. Kafka's "Brief an den Vater" ("Letter to his Father", 1919) is used as a starting point for analysing his story "Das Urteil" ("The Judgement", 1912). The article also offers some ideas as to how these same rhetorical and affective strategies are at work in the narrative design of "Die Verwandlung" ("The Metamorphosis", 1915) and in the novel *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*, 1925). Each of these "punitive fantasies"[4] ends with a scene of the protagonist's death, either through suicide or execution. All of these stories also guide and manipulate the audience's emotional responses in ways that are very similar to the affective strategies Kafka used in his "Letter to his Father". In Kafka's aesthetic game, artistic deception leads to the strategy of "freezing the laughter"[5] by abruptly ending the reader's detachment or by fooling readers into feeling pity and fear for his self-deceiving characters. The theoretical concepts underlying the analysis of Kafka's texts are introduced before investigating his use of rhetorical strategies in greater detail.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: AUTHORIAL EMPATHY, TEXTUAL STRATEGIES, READER RESPONSE

In a rhetorical approach to writing and reading emotions, form and affective impact are perceived as interconnected. Following James Phelan's model (2005

3 Kafka 1977: 16; "Ich glaube, man sollte überhaupt nur solche Bücher lesen, die einen beißen und stechen. Wenn das Buch, das wir lesen, uns nicht mit einem Faustschlag auf den Schädel weckt, wozu lesen wir dann das Buch? […] Wir brauchen aber die Bücher, die auf uns wirken wie ein Unglück, das uns sehr schmerzt, wie der Tod eines, den wir lieber hatten als uns, wie wenn wir in Wälder verstoßen würden, von allen Menschen weg, wie ein Selbstmord, ein Buch muß die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns." Kafka 1999: 36.

4 Sokel 2002: 41.

5 Ibid.: 12.

& 2007), storytelling can be seen as a rhetorical act in which the narrative strategies designed by the author have consequences for the reader's emotional engagement with the narrative. Thus, the focus has to be on the feedback loop of emotions negotiated among aspects of authorial agency, textual strategies for evoking empathy (or empathic aversion) and reader response. Among the concepts used in this article is the term "authorial audience", which was introduced and developed by Peter Rabinowitz (1976 and 1987) and James Phelan (2005) in their rhetorical approaches to narrative. This concept refers to a hypothetical audience that responds to the text as designed by its (implied) author. In practice, real-life readers can become members of the authorial audience to whom the text's rhetorical purposes are communicated. The recursive relationship between authorial agency, textual phenomena and reader response also entails the possibility of shared readings among different flesh-and-blood readers, even though individual readers might find some authorial audiences easier to join than others.[6]

Rhetorical approaches to narrative have also acknowledged the effects that narrative progression has on readers' emotional involvement in reading narratives. Two different aspects of narrative progression are important from the perspective of this article. Firstly, the judgements readers make about characters and storytellers (narrators and authors) have consequences for how we experience and understand narrative form. Here, "narrative form" is understood to mean the elements, techniques and structures of narratives that elicit particular emotion effects.[7] Secondly, narrative form can be experienced only through the temporal process of reading and responding (emotionally, cognitively and ethically) to narrative. Narrative progression involves both textual dynamic, that is, the movement of narrative from a beginning through the middle to an end, and reader dynamics, meaning the reader's engagement with this movement, which both follows and influences textual dynamics.[8] Readers make (emotional) judgements about characters and narrators, and they continuously construct and reconstruct these judgements.

The rhetorical triangle of authorial agency, textual phenomena and reader response also determines the process of narrative empathizing.[9] Patrick Colm

6 Cf. Phelan 2005: 18-19.

7 Cf. Phelan 2007: 3.

8 Cf. ibid.

9 According to *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, for instance, "[n]arrative empathy plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it […], in mental simulation during reading, in the aesthetics of reception when readers experience it, and in the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it" (Keen 2013: s.p.).

Hogan's (2011) two-fold model, which separates the arousal level of empathy from the evaluation level of an empathizing response, explains this question further. Whereas the former type of empathy is triggered spontaneously by a perception, the imagination or an emotional memory, elaborative empathy "involves a self-conscious attempt to imagine the condition of the other person".[10] Both types relate to our immersion in fictional storyworlds. In other words, we become spontaneously open to parallel emotional experiences by mirroring responses to the fictional other or we attend to simulating, categorizing, modelling or otherwise understanding the character's emotional experience. According to Hogan, literature involves the possibility of cultivating openness to empathic experience in a setting that is devoid of the egoistic conditions of real-life emotions and situations.[11] However, the uses and consequences of narrative empathy can be more unruly than has thus far been acknowledged by scholars, ranging from positive to negative and neutral effects.[12] Narrative empathy may also be *strategically* employed by authors for purposes of emotional – and ideological – manipulation.

Narrative empathy involves an author's empathy, but rhetorically it emerges through a text's design. The complexity of the issue stands out, first of all, when we begin to investigate the *formal* aspects of narrative empathy. Previous studies on narrative empathy have often focused on listing certain techniques (e.g. a first-person narrative situation and narrative perspective) that might lead to an empathy-generating effect, including character identification. Yet, already more than half a century ago, Booth (1961) argued against the idea that there could be any single narrative technique that would inevitably result in particular rhetorical or emotional effects. Rather, the successfulness of every narrative technique is related to how well it serves the rhetorical, aesthetic or ethical purposes of an individual narrative. Thus, in discussing strategic empathy, we need to pay attention to the combination of techniques used. The approach laid out here draws on the idea that the analysis of empathy-generating effects always calls for interpre-

10 Hogan 2011: 65.

11 Cf. ibid.: 68-69.

12 In recent narrative studies, there has been discussion on the potential of literature to enhance readers' social awareness. Some scholars have even talked about the moral growth of citizens through the development of moral sentiments such as empathy and sympathy. Cf. e.g. Nussbaum 1990 and 2001. As Suzanne Keen (2007) and other literary scholars have already argued, the widely celebrated "empathy–altruism" hypothesis, the idea of fiction reading as leading to altruistic real-life action, needs more evidence. Cf. Keen 2007: 65, 130.

tative inquiry from all points of the rhetorical triangle.[13] Rhetorical and emotion effects are a product of multilevel narrative communication designed by the author, and this communication involves both textual and reader dynamics.

A second aspect of narrative empathy that has been the subject of lively debate is the degree of aesthetic distance involved in the process of both writing and reading. The process of writing emotions, which is the focus of this article, is related to the extent to which a given story is derived from an author's personal experience.[14] From a literary scholar's point of view, however, the main interest in examining authorial empathy lies in the *process* of writing and in the *representation* of the emotion rather than in the actual emotion. As Hogan[15] defines this distinction, "[t]he crucial point here is that the depictive validity of a literary work does not derive from its source in some prior [author's] experience. It derives from its *production* of such an experience" (emphasis his). In studying the practices of writing, our main concern is to examine how an author's real-life experiences are *transformed* into aesthetic form. Next, this question is explored in the context of Kafka's practices of writing emotions.

THE REWARD FOR SERVING THE DEVIL: LAUGHTER AND THE KAFKAESQUE POETICS OF GUILT AND SHAME

Kafka's authorship serves as an example of the ways in which authorial empathy can be used to manipulate an audience's tendency to feel with fictional others in order to evoke powerful effects of aesthetic shock, confusion and estrangement. In other words, this article shows how Kafka strategically uses empathy for rhetorical and aesthetical purposes and how the very process of writing emotions reveals certain aspects of this strategy. Thus, the focus is on the so-called "aesthetic emotions" (e.g. estrangement, wonder, disgust, pity or sadness, or sympathy) that do not necessarily motivate practical behaviours in the way that real-life emotions do. Yet they influence the ways in which readers make emotional and cognitive judgements of characters and events at the moment of first reading

13 Cf. Phelan 2005: 5.

14 A text's genre (ranging from nonfictional autobiography, memoirs and history to fictional fantasy novels) of course influences the ways in which we evaluate the representations of emotions in the text. Also, the choice of narrative voice or situation (first-person narration vs. third-person narration) and of narrative perspective plays an important role in this respect.

15 Hogan 2011: 22.

(and potentially during the second reading). Instead of character identification, it is more accurate to talk about emotional *projection*: the reader's tendency to adopt the fictional Other's position temporarily during the reading process.

The analysis of authorial empathy in Kafka's work begins with a discussion of a letter that Kafka wrote to his father in 1919. This document and its affective and rhetorical elements deserve special attention because all reveal something important about Kafka's methods of perspectival role-taking in transforming his emotions into aesthetic form. After exploring the affective and rhetorical elements of the letter, the second part of the analysis will examine how the same narrative strategies are at play in "Das Urteil". The focus is on the role of the author's empathic role-taking, that is, his projection of the self onto a fictive being. What does the author's experience of losing the boundaries of the self during the writing process mean from the authorial audience's perspective? How is this experience transformed into a narrative design?

In his letter, Kafka confesses that his father was always his primary audience. His main goal in writing was to make a true connection with his father while simultaneously breaking free of the parental influence. He freed and healed himself through his work, even though the father's presence still haunted him, even on paper: "My writing was all about you; all I did there, after all, was to bemoan what I could not bemoan upon your breast."[16] According to Max Brod, Kafka's father never received the letter.[17] Kafka gave it to his mother to hand on, but she never delivered it to the father. The first part of Kafka's letter gives voice to the son. Through his eyes, Hermann Kafka is portrayed as an insensitive and self-satisfied tyrant who was only occasionally able to give the tenderness and care his son needed. The most frequently mentioned emotions in the letter are fear, guilt and shame. Capable of analysing the emotional dynamics of the relationship and family life from a more distanced position, the adult Kafka writes about the differences in the temperaments of father and son. Not having "the Kafka will", the worldly dominance, self-confidence or physical strength, the son is destined to appear as weak, ungrateful and cold in his father's eyes. This estrangement caused permanent damage to the son's mental health.[18]

After analysing the relationship with his father in a calm but affecting manner, Kafka then gives his father a voice. The father's hypothetical response in the second part of the letter points out the son's potential hypocrisy and self-denial in expressing his emotions. In his hypothetical answer, the father claims that his

16 Kafka 1976: 576; "Mein Schreiben handelte von Dir, ich klagte dort ja nur, was ich an Deiner Brust nicht klagen konnte." Kafka 1965: 43.

17 Gray et al. 2005: 49.

18 Cf. Kafka 1965: 7-9.

son has been playing with words in his address to his parent, "at the same time trying to be 'too clever' and 'too affectionate'".[19] By repudiating both his and his father's guilt, the son wants to free himself of all responsibility. In Kafka's letter the father's judgement of his son is related to the recognition of the young man's self-deception. The son is unwilling to take part in the social obligations of family life, including getting married (Kafka and his fiancée Julie Wohryzek had just called off their wedding; Kafka had also twice broken off an engagement with Felice Bauer). In order to avoid the emotion of shame, the son blamed his father for his failed engagements. The third part of Kafka's letter, its very ending, shows the son's attempt to set the record straight so that both he and his father could live together and die peacefully: "[I]n my opinion something has yet been achieved that is so closely approximate to the truth that it may be able to reassure us both a little and make our living and our dying easier."[20]

The very ambivalence in Kafka's use of authorial empathy – both its tender and its dark potential – emerges in the design of his letter in a way that is comparable to his fictional stories. Sokel, among other Kafka scholars, has described Kafka's narrative "jokes" as a deliberate, sadomasochist play on the audience's emotional responses.[21] This interpretation is supported by the ideas Kafka expressed in his letter to Pollak in August of 1902. At times Kafka felt an urge to give in to "the wicked criticaster" living inside him:

> And here comes a joke, a marvelous one, that makes God in His heaven weep bitterly and sends hell into hellish convulsions of laughter. It's this: We can never have another person's holy of holies, only our own – that's a joke, a marvelous one. […] You neither wept nor laughed. That's how it is – you're neither God in heaven nor the wicked devil.
> Only the wicked criticaster […] inhabits you, and he is a subordinate devil whom, however, you should shake off. And so, for the good of your soul, I shall tell you the strange tale of how once upon a time…, may God bless him, was overcome by Franz Kafka.[22]

19 Kafka 1976: 584; "[…] gleichzeitig 'übergescheit' und 'überzärtlich' […]." Kafka 1965: 61.

20 Kafka 1976: 585; "[I]st meiner Meinung nach doch etwas der Wahrheit so sehr Angenähertes erreicht, daß es uns beide ein wenig beruhigen und Leben und Sterben leichter machen kann." Kafka 1965: 63.

21 Cf. Sokel 2002: 76.

22 Kafka 1977: 4; "Und nun kommt ein Witz, ein ganz vortrefflicher, bei dem der liebe Herrgott bitterlich weint und die Hölle ganz höllische Lachkrämpfe bekommt – das Allerheiligste eines Fremden können wir niemals haben, nur das eigene – das ist ein Witz, ein ganz vortrefflicher. […] Du hast weder geweint noch gelacht, Du bist eben weder der liebe Herrgott noch der böse Teufel.

Kafka himself laughed uncontrollably whenever he read his stories aloud to his friends. Yet in his textual game, the "hellish convulsions of laughter" were always accompanied by feelings of tender sadness – the presence of an inner, bitterly weeping god. An awareness that "[w]e can never have another person's holy of holies, only our own" is also cause for existential despair. Yet this awareness brings relief and the possibility of liberation. For Kafka, his protagonists' dying scenes, for instance, were a source of intense pleasure, comparable to the experience of writing: "[…] such dying scenes are a secret game, in fact, I am happy to be in my dying protagonist",[23] he claimed. Readers too are invited to take part in his aesthetical game of losing the self in the fictional Other, of transgressing and escaping the boundaries of the self. In this respect the method of writing emotions resembles Kafka's ruthless honesty in viewing the shortcomings of his own character, including his tendencies of narcissistic self-absorption. As Kafka wrote in his letter, we truly need the "books that affect us […] *like a suicide*".[24]

One of Kafka's punitive fantasies is the story "Das Urteil", which he wrote in a trance-like state in a single eight-hour session one night in September of 1912. In his diary, Kafka describes his writing experience as an ecstatic self-abandonment that led to an "absolute opening of body and soul".[25] According to Max Brod, Kafka once told him that he had a strong ejaculation in his mind when he wrote the story's last sentence.[26] The feelings of self-transcendence and sexual pleasure were accompanied by the sensation of omnipotence, of being in control. What is especially interesting with regard to this process is its connection to the narrative innovation Kafka himself considered to be his breakthrough in writing "Das Urteil". This story (which is dedicated to "Felice B.") introduces the technique Kafka used in the other works of his mature period. In the tale, there is an utterly objective narrator. The third-person narrator's perspective almost melds into that of the main character. By diminishing the distance between the third-person narrator and the main character, the stories eliminate the

Nur der böse Kritikus [...] lebt in Dir und das ist ein untergeordneter Teufel, den man aber doch loswerden sollte. Und so will ich Dir zu Nutz und Frommen die absonderliche Geschichte erzählen, wie weyland…, den Gott selig habe, von Franz Kafka überwunden wurde." Kafka 1999: 13-14.

23 Translation Sokel 2002: 210; "[…] sind solche Schilderungen im geheimen ein Spiel, ich freue mich ja in dem Sterbenden zu sterben." Kafka 1951: 320-321.

24 Kafka 1977: 16, emphasis E.N.

25 Translation Sokel 2002: 71; "vollständigen Öffnung des Leibes und der Seele" Kafka 1951: 294.

26 Brod 1960: 158.

distance between the protagonist and the reader. Since the narrator's perspective becomes almost identical with that of the character, the authorial audience too is forced to share the protagonist's condition of being a prisoner of his brain. "Das Urteil" is also a text which has striking resemblances to Kafka's letter to his father written seven years later.

Let's examine for a moment the narrative progression of "Das Urteil" before analysing the story in the context of the letter. At the beginning of the tale, we encounter a young merchant, Georg Bendemann, who has just finished writing a letter to a friend who has immigrated to Russia. Georg is about to marry "a young woman from a well-to-do-family", and he is uncertain whether it is appropriate to write about his happiness to this childhood friend. The authorial audience is invited to consider and reconsider the sincerity of Georg's guilt and his concern for his friend. At first, the audience's emotional and ethical judgements of the protagonist are affected by his seemingly sympathetic attitude towards his friend. As the first stage of the story approaches its end, however, readers tend to recognize more clearly Georg's use of his friend's situation as a narcissistic boost for his own self-esteem. The protagonist keeps making comparisons between his and his friend's situations in business and in personal life. All these comparisons seem to be very flattering to Georg.

The middle part of the tale consists of Georg's conversation with his father. Georg is convinced that he is genuinely concerned with his father's well-being: he undresses him and carries him to bed and covers him up. At the same time, however, readers are once again guided to see the protagonist's self-serving attitude. The more tender feelings are mixed with the son's condescending thoughts about his new role in the father's business. The suppressed emotions of guilt and shame emerge the moment the father accuses his son of not telling him the whole truth about his departed friend. At first, the father denies the friend's existence altogether. Then he makes strong accusations about the ways in which Georg has treated his friend. He blames his son for betraying the friend because his fiancée, Frieda, has lifted up her skirts. Paralyzed by this sudden blow, Georg loses control of his mind. The discussion between father and son culminates in the father's condemning his son to death by drowning. Even more surprising is Georg's instant acceptance of his father's judgement at the close of the story. Declaring his love for his father and his late mother, Georg rushes to his death by falling into an "endless stream of traffic".[27]

Owing to the unexplained, irrational nature of Georg's guilt and shame, the authorial audience's primary responses to the story are surprise and confusion. The effect of confusion derives partly from the audience's inability to make firm

27 Kafka 2000: 72; "ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr" Kafka 1954: 22.

emotional and ethical judgements about the characters.[28] The protagonist's sudden loss of his sense of self guides the reader to reconsider the accuracy of the protagonist's previous judgements as well as the reader's own judgements of the character. The father's self-contradictions appear equally problematic. He is revealed to be a jealous and vengeful parent. Georg's self-surrender potentially restores some of the readers' sympathies, but the narrative tension of the story never resolves. Like Kafka's other stories, this tale lacks a resolution that would bring the reader relief and enlightenment at its close.

The emotional effect of "Das Urteil" stems from a narrative design which is astonishingly similar to the design of Kafka's letter. Kafka's rhetorical strategies in his writing seem to be very close to the strategies Kafka describes in his letter as his father's methods of bringing him up:

> Your extremely effective rhetorical methods in bringing me up, which never failed to work with me anyway, were: *abuse, threats, irony, spiteful laughter, and – oddly enough – self-pity*. I can't recall your ever having abused me directly and in downright abusive terms. Nor was that necessary; you had so many other methods […].[29]

Kafka uses similar, indirect means of "abuse" in tricking his readers into adopting the characters' perspective and then destabilizing the basis for this sympathizing projection. In Kafka's stories we often meet self-deceiving characters whose rejected wishes and desires are revealed only after readers have been invited to feel pity and fear for the suffering Other.

From this perspective, the second part of Kafka's letter – the father's hypothetical answer to his son – is the most interesting. As in "Das Urteil", in Kafka's letter the father's judgement of his son is related to the recognition of the son's self-deception. The conflict between the two selves in "Das Urteil" is rendered through the use of the two male characters in the story, Georg and his more ascetic friend. Through the father's condemnation, the son is able to avoid resolving his conflicting desires: for Kafka himself, his desire to gain independence through marriage, on the one hand, and his desire to maintain the bachelor's (and the writer's) freedom, on the other. The father's hypothetical condemnation

28 Cf. Phelan 2011.

29 Kafka 1976: 563, emphasis E.N. "Deine äußerst wirkungsvollen, wenigstens mir gegenüber niemals versagenden rednerischen Mittel bei der Erziehung waren: Schimpfen, Drohen, Ironie, böses Lachen und – merkwürdigerweise – Selbstbeklagung. Daß Du mich direkt und mit ausdrücklichen Schimpfwörtern beschimpft hättest, kann ich mich nicht erinnern. Es war auch nicht nötig, Du hattest so viele andere Mittel […]." Kafka 1965: 18.

of his son in the letter brings to mind the sudden exposure and unmasking manifested in Georg's cry to his father: "And so you've been lying in ambush for me!"[30] In the final part of Kafka's letter, which shows the son's attempts at reconciliation, corresponds to Georg's confession of love for his parents at the end of "Das Urteil". The pleasure of dying is manifested in the close of "Das Urteil" as Georg stumbles into the stream of traffic (the German word *Verkehr*, "traffic", also means intercourse).

Existential feelings of guilt and shame are manifested in the all-encompassing threat of some invisible authority, which emerges in almost every story Kafka wrote.[31] Guilt and shame, which Kafka describes in his letter as the main elements of his emotional life, are transformed into an organizing tone or mood in his stories. In the Kafkaesque poetics of shame and guilt, aestheticized emotions haunt the authorial audience as an atmosphere of the uncanny in the storyworld, which elicits both cognitive and emotional confusion in the audience. In the allegorical readings of Kafka's stories, the presence of a (paternal) authoritative power has been approached from multiple perspectives: juridical and social, religious and spiritual, existential and psychological. The psychological interpretations, of course, have been inspired by Kafka's letter to his father in which Kafka himself refers to the themes he used in his writing.

One of these references is a quotation from *Der Prozess*, which Kafka provides in describing his father's effect on the development of his nervous temperament: "I had lost my self-confidence where you were concerned, and in its place had developed a boundless sense of guilt. (In recollection of this boundlessness I once wrote of someone, accurately: 'He is afraid the shame will outlive him.')."[32] We can find these words at the end of *Der Prozess* where Joseph K. is finally executed; helpless, "[l]ike a dog".[33] To make the network of references even more complex, Kafka uses this same expression in writing about the end of his life in his letter to Max Brod: "My future is not rosy and I will surely

30 Kafka 2000: 71; "Du hast mir also aufgelauert!" Kafka 1954: 21.

31 According to Tenenbaum, existential shame and guilt in Kafka's work derive not from actual wrongdoings but from internalized self-doubt and insecurities. Kafka's characters are all afraid of facing some aspects of themselves, which influences their abilities to make choices. Cf. Tenenbaum 2009: 120.

32 Kafka 1976: 572; "Ich hatte vor Dir das Selbstvertrauen verloren, dafür ein grenzenloses Schuldbewußtsein eingetauscht. (In Erinnerung an diese Grenzenlosigkeit schrieb ich von jemandem einmal richtig: 'Er fürchtet, die Scham werde ihn noch überleben.')." Kafka 1965: 37.

33 Kafka 1998: 231; "[w]ie ein Hund" Kafka 1990: 312.

– this much I can see – die like a dog".[34] Shameful death, which simultaneously provides strange pleasures of self-sacrifice, defines the essence of the emotional components of both the author's self-analyses and his work.

Kafka uses a similar metaphorical struggle in the narrative design of the allegory "Die Verwandlung". Here, family relations become a trial that ends with the death of the unfit son. Likewise, in Kafka's letter, the father–son relationship is described as a combat between a human being and a parasite, a vermin, who sucks the blood of others in order to continue living:

> I admit that we fight with each other, but there are two kinds of fighting. There is chivalrous fighting, in which the forces of independent opponents are measured against each other, each one remaining alone, losing alone, winning alone. And there is the fighting of vermin, which not only sting but, at the same time, suck the blood, too, to sustain their own life. That is after all what the professional soldier really is, and that is what you are. You are unfit for life; but in order to settle down in it comfortably, without worries and without self-reproaches, you prove that I have deprived you of all your fitness for life and put it in my pockets. What does it matter to you now if you are unfit for life, now it is my responsibility, but you calmly lie down and let yourself be hauled along life, physically and mentally, by me.[35]

Even though the parallels between the structure of the letter and "Die Verwandlung" are not as explicit as in the case of "Das Urteil", the allegory shows similar rhetorical strategies. In "Die Verwandlung", the effectiveness of the allegory is based on using the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, as a metaphor that becomes flesh during the narrative. The narrative progression of the allegory – and the readers' emotional reactions along the narrative path – follows Gregor's estrangement and his shock as he gradually becomes more conscious of the limitations of his

34 Kafka 1977: 24; "Mein Weg ist gar nicht gut und ich muß – soviel Übersicht habe ich – wie ein Hund zugrunde gehen." Kafka 1999: 51.

35 Kafka 1976: 585; "Ich gebe zu, daß wir miteinander kämpfen, aber es gibt zweierlei Kampf. Den ritterlichen Kampf, wo sich die Kräfte selbständiger Gegner messen, jeder bleibt für sich, verliert für sich, siegt für sich. Und den Kampf des Ungeziefers, welches nicht nur sticht, sondern gleich auch zu seiner Lebenserhaltung das Blut saugt. Das ist ja der eigentliche Berufssoldat, und das bist Du. Lebensuntüchtig bist Du; um es Dir aber darin bequem, sorgenlos und ohne Selbstvorwürfe einrichten zu können, beweist Du, daß ich alle Deine Lebenstüchtigkeit Dir genommen und in meine Tasche gesteckt habe. Was kümmert es Dich jetzt, wenn Du lebensuntüchtig bist, ich habe ja die Verantwortung, Du aber streckst Dich ruhig aus und läßt Dich, körperlich und geistig, von mir durchs Leben schleifen." Kafka 1965: 61.

new condition. At the beginning of the narrative, Gregor wakes up one morning trapped in the body of a vermin. However, he is still able to feel and think like a human being:

When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. He was lying on his back as hard as armor plate, and when he lifted his head a little, he saw his vaulted brown belly, sectioned by arch-shaped ribs, to whose dome the cover, about to slide off completely, could barely cling. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, were waving helplessly before his eyes.[36]

Through mental projection, the authorial audience is invited to share the protagonist's state of not-knowing, of not understanding what is happening to him. However, the scenes in the tale also invite the audience to feel disgust and empathic aversion as they encounter the protagonist. These effects are intensified by representing the protagonist's physical sensations, which reinforce the audience's emotional response. The portrayal of Gregor's discomfort is aimed at generating a similar embodied response of unease in the audience. The story's estranging effect is also created by portraying Gregor's self-alienation as he hears his peculiar voice and observes the awkward movements of his body as if he were a prisoner of his foreign body ("[he heard] his own voice answering, unmistakably his own voice";[37] "[…] white dots which he had no idea what to make of"[38]). Such details as the white spots on Gregor's belly and the brown fluid coming out of his mouth are highly repulsive. What was Kafka's purpose in describing these details?

It is true that Kafka's use of authorial empathy can be seen as having ethical dimensions. The horror and isolation of Gregor's situation may be seen as serving Kafka's rhetorical purpose of enlarging empathic solidarity beyond the hu-

36 Kafka 1996: 3; "Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt. Er lag auf seinem panzerartig harten Rücken und sah, wenn er den Kopf ein wenig hob, seinen gewölbten, braunen, von bogenförmigen Versteifungen geteilten Bauch, auf dessen Höhe sich die Bettdecke, zum gänzlichen Niedergleiten bereit, kaum noch erhalten konnte. Seine vielen, im Vergleich zu seinem sonstigen Umfang kläglich dünnen Beine flimmerten ihm hilflos vor den Augen." Kafka 1960: 1.

37 Kafka 1996: 5; "[E]r seine antwortende Stimme hörte, die wohl unverkennbar seine […]." Kafka 1960: 4.

38 Kafka 1996: 4; "[Er] fand die juckende Stelle, die mit lauter kleinen weiβen Pünktchen besetzt war, die er nicht zu beurteilen verstand […]". Kafka 1960: 2.

man species to all sentient beings. Even vermin can be sensitive creatures with feelings. The estranging effect, generated by the introduction of the fantastic and the supernatural into the mimetic storyworld, thus may work as a pathway, leading us to see reality anew through the Other. Be that as it may, the reader's projection also "traps" him or her in the character's consciousness. The authorial audience is invited to feel Gregor's agony, isolation and helpless suffering as, little by little, he loses his human qualities.

Yet in a sense Kafka's authorial audience is *fooled* into feeling pity and fear for the character.[39] As in many of Kafka's stories, in "Die Verwandlung" the audience's hermeneutic task is to recognize the disguise of the protagonist's self-delusions, even the comical aspects of his self-loathing. Previous studies on Kafka's story have pointed out the resemblances between Gregor's metamorphosis and the fantasy of the protagonist Raban in another of Kafka's tales, "Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande" ("Wedding Preparations in the Country", 1907/1908).[40] Raban imagines sending his human body into a social situation so that he might stay in bed. He thinks of transforming into a giant beetle. Similarly, Gregor's struggles in his new condition serve as an expression of his desire to escape his responsibilities as a travelling salesman and the provider for his family. This analogy is emphasized in Gregor's thought after he has attempted to rise from bed: "'Oh God', he thought, 'what a grueling job I've picked!'"[41] This weird leap from the realm of the fantastic to the mimetic storyworld reveals the function of the transformation as a metaphor that brings Gregor's secret desire to life and enables him to escape his situation and gain freedom without the painful recognition of his own guilt and shame. Dying becomes his ultimate liberation.

CONCLUSION

Kafka's writing is deeply troubling. He employs authorial empathy in order to manipulate the audience's feelings by calling upon readers' human tendency to feel with others, then leaves them without a stable basis to analyse intellectually what has happened. As Emily Troscianko (2013) has pointed out, Kafka's work is among those fictional texts which are fundamentally enactive and cognitively

39 Cf. Sokel 2002: 76.

40 Cf. e.g. Greve 2011: 52.

41 Kafka 1996: 3. "'Ah Gott', dachte er, 'was für einen anstrengenden Beruf habe ich gewählt!'" Kafka 1960: 2.

realistic: they contain evocations of visual perception (narrative perspective) and emotion that establish a compellingly direct connection with the reader's imagination. Yet these texts also leave the reader baffled by their violation of our folk-psychological assumptions. Kafka himself often expressed not only his amusement, but also his confusion in reading his own stories, asking someone else to tell him what they really meant. The tales seemed to lie beyond his control, just as his characters were forced to adjust to an irresistible restlessness and the destruction of his storyworlds.

In Kafka's existential, modernist allegories, the art of indirect communication from the author to the authorial audience is affected by the tendency of allegory to insist on a search for meaning, but at the same time this strategy frustrates the readers' attempts to obtain certain knowledge. Despite their dark undertones, Kafka's tales often have a liberating function, which is revealed through the reader's encounter with the uncanny. In Kafka's stories the triangle between authorial agency, reader response and textual phenomena comes back to aspects of self-loss, immersion and the ethics of strategic empathizing. Kafka's authorial purpose seems to be rooted in his deliberately difficult communication itself, inviting the audience to join him in the quest for human knowledge. By refusing to give definite answers, Kafka forces the readers of his narratives to see their own conditions mirrored in the situations of his protagonists.

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