6. Kafka, Nietzsche, and the Question of Literary History

Published by

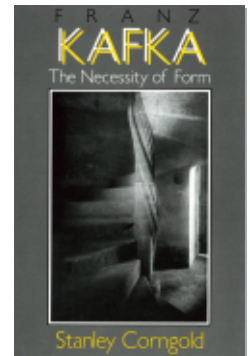➡ For additional information about this book

PART II

Kafka's Context

Chapter Six

Kafka, Nietzsche, and the Question of Literary History

The fascination of Nietzsche and Kafka is the fascination of what's difficult, a difficulty bound to increase when the question is posed of the historical relation of Nietzsche and Kafka. The question is made additionally difficult by the resistance of each to literary-historical recovery. Both Kafka, explicitly, and Nietzsche, through a reading of him by Paul de Man, assert the impossibility of any literary history that could include them.[1] This chapter explores the reason for their resistance, chiefly in order to see whether it can be reversed.

Both Nietzsche and Kafka deny the possibility of literary history by denying some of the fundamental relations assumed to constitute literary history. I am thinking, first, of their common critique of the concept of antithesis and the overcoming of antithesis, whose most inclusive rhetorical counterpart is the metaphor. This figure of thought and rhetoric informs literary history by "bridging" (as Hans Robert Jauss says) the individual literary work and its historical moment.[2] The second object of Nietzsche's and Kafka's critique is the concept of finite reversal, whose rhetorical counterpart is the sym-

---

1. Paul de Man, "Genesis and Genealogy (Nietzsche)," in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 79–102 (hereafter cited in this chapter as AR).

2. Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetics of Reception,* trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 45, writes as an archetypical literary historian when he declares that "the gap between literature and history, between aesthetic and historical knowledge, *can be bridged* if literary history . . . discov-

metrical chiasm. Finite reversal is also involved in the moment of antithesis and its overcoming: it describes, for example, two authors held together and "embedded [at different places] in the historical process"[3] precisely by the figure of opposition or difference between them. A second writer is said to reverse absolutely the hierarchy of values or rhetorical strategies of the earlier writer—for example, Kafka reverses Goethe in the view of a historian like Wilhelm Emrich—and such reversals are used to emplot a literary historical narrative. But this use depends on the stability of the moment of chiastic reversal. If this moment cannot in fact be held firm, then it in turn will reverse the force of one writer's precedence or authority over the other, making the question of their difference one of incessant reciprocal usurpation, turning a figure of opposition into one of asymmetrical chiasm with unsettling effect.

Both Nietzsche and Kafka criticize the concept of finite reversal, yet Kafka's critique has implications so different from those of Nietzsche's that his position on reversal might itself constitute a finite reversal of Nietzsche's. Literary history could then take its bearings from the different views of Nietzsche and Kafka implied by the types of reversal enacted in their texts. But what the historian chooses to make of the reversal in their views of reversal will still depend on whether he or she adopts Nietzsche's view or Kafka's. And so, it would seem, the direction of such a literary history could be indefinitely modified, until it too had once again been reversed.

* * *

What is involved in the writing of a literary history that Nietzsche and Kafka should so oppose it? Literary history treats literary works in their irreducible connection with real things that are said to be accessible from outside the work. Let us call these real things, taken together, "the world of the historian's concern," as they converge on

---

ers . . . the socially formative function that belongs to [literature]" (my italics). Fredric Jameson also notes: "One of the ways one can begin to historicize is by making ['mythical binary oppositions or antitheses']—provided one gets rid of them later" ("Overview," in *Rewriting Literary History*, ed. Tak-Wai Wong and M.A. Abbas [Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1984], p. 343).

3. René Wellek and Austin Warren speak of "system[s] of norms embedded in the historical process," in "Literary History," in their *Theory of Literature*, 3d ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), p. 265 (hereafter cited in this chapter as TL).

the historical moment of the work in question. This world I call the referent; and in so doing, I assign the world the primacy, because referent means "the first term in a proposition to which succeeding terms relate."[4] The force of this primacy consists in the power of the referent to penetrate, saturate, coincide with, master, and contain the text of style.

The referent world may be the empirical life of authors, chiefly material (as their socioeconomic base) or interpersonal (their erotic objects) or else intellectual (such as a text they have read, of which conceptual reminiscences survive in the author's work: *Tristram Shandy* in Nietzsche's *Human, All-too-Human;* or *The Sentimental Education* in Kafka's "Wedding Preparations in the Country"; or, indeed, Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* in Kafka's "Eight Octavo Notebooks" [DF 50–135]). Further, the referent may be the political life of the epoch, which in German literary histories of the nineteenth century expresses an ideal. (For Karl Rosenkranz, for example, this ideal is "the emergent self-consciousness of spirit that knows its own freedom"; for Georg Gottfried Gervinus, it is the *Grundidee*, the foundational idea of national political progress.[5] That is one literary history which would not include Kafka and Nietzsche!) The referent may further be the work's bearing on the future as, for example, what Jauss calls literature's "socially formative function";[6] or on the past, as when foregrounded linguistic elements are reified as conventional norms or when parts of an earlier work are used as connectors, because that work is considered to belong unproblematically to the canon, quite apart from whether, say, Nietzsche and Kafka made knowing use of it. Thus, portions of Friedrich Schlegel, whom Nietzsche probably did not read, are said to anticipate *Beyond Good and Evil,* and anticipations of Kafka's "A Country Doctor" are found in William Blake's "O rose, thou art sick!" Finally, the referent could be, à la Louis Althusser and Fredric Jameson, a historical structure immanent only in its effects or, à la Michel Foucault, the way in

4. *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1987).

5. This sentence is indebted to Michael Batts (University of Vancouver), "Historical Perspective in German Histories of Literature" (paper delivered at 16th Congress, International Federation for Modern Languages and Literatures, Budapest, August 1984).

6. See n. 2 above.

which the discourse of literature—including the discourse of literary historiography—is "circulated" and "owned."[7]

If, however, we define literary-historical writing so broadly, would there then be any kind of writing about literature that is not literary history writing and would not appeal to the referent? Here one could invoke various types of literary interpretation that programmatically disavow referentiality: formalisms, which in principle produce meanings strictly immanent to the work; and avant-garde structuralism, which describes sign patterns within works as corresponding in an only arbitrary manner to meanings that are themselves the signs of other signs.[8] Finally, there is the discourse posing to literary history-writing its most forceful challenge—"deconstruction"—which interrupts the structuralist patterning of textual and cultural signs by discovering so-called aporias, moments of absolute indetermination, producing a void of reference and equally, a bad infinity of virtual reference.[9] The challenge to literary history occurs when a kind of difference is posited between style and referent that introduces a perpetual delay or deferral of any coincidence of textual

7. Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital,* trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), especially pp. 182–93; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 23–58; and Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice,* ed. and trans. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 138.

8. "The signified is . . . *always already in the position of the signifier*" (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], p. 73).

9. Werner Hamacher restates these distinctions in the course of advancing positive claims for deconstruction in a methodological preface that I quote (in translation and with the publisher's permission) at some length: "Among the generally respected basic theorems of the hedonistic as well as of the critical reading of literary texts is the claim that they are the verbal representations of realities. As regards the kind of consensus that this theorem enjoys, it remains unimportant whether one understands by 'reality' social *or* individual experience or whether one understands by 'representation' a specific form of imitation [*Nachbildung*], construction, *or* expression. The benefit of transparency to which this proposition owes its attractiveness is obtained at the high cost of a hermeneutical consequence impossible not to draw from it. This proposition disposes over texts as empirical objects, which, by means of a more or less mechanical reduction, are then retranslated into corresponding meanings. And so under the dictates of this proposition, literary-critical/historical research is obliged to understand its task as the systematic restitution of those realities to which literary texts themselves are supposed to correspond; of the means of representation that are employed to achieve correspondence with such realities; and the transformations that experience undergoes in the course of its literary articulation. It is in only mild mitigation of the claims advanced by such an understanding of literature and its

understanding and historical moment—in short, eschews the model of antithesis whose implicit teleology is of antithesis bridged and overcome.[10]

* * *

reading that literary texts are valued as the experience of reality sui generis. For as problematic as the theorem of reductiveness becomes when literary works themselves are granted an ultimate authority and a unique reality, it nonetheless remains impossible to overlook the fact that this maximal thesis as to the real character of literature—in flight from a poorly understood tension between experience and its representation—brings about a no less impoverished equivalence between them both. If the earnest attempt to relate literature as a representation to a reality—even a reality itself conceived as already literarily preformed—frees itself from the scandalous stumbling block that literature turns into via a social-historical, psychological, and anthropological reduction to empirical data while falling with fatal certainty into the trap of empiricism or historicism, so the hypostasis of the literary text as irreducibly unique liberates it from the requirements of intelligibility. If the concept of representation is in the one case the license of passing from it to something of which it is supposed to be the representation, then in the other case, in which it appears to be purified into the self-representation of a reality, that license is the prohibition against passing over to that representation from any reality other than its own. In both cases, the text is explicated according to the standard of an economy of meaningfulness, by means of which either the stability of the represented (whether state-of-consciousness, affect, or historical fact) or the representation itself *as* representation (whether creative process, self-sufficient structure, or immanent play of reference) is supposed to be grounded. In both cases, which arise as contrary consequences from the common maxim that literature is representation, a possibility, however, is overlooked for the sake of guaranteeing theory's craving for security: namely, that it is precisely not the task of literature to fulfill the concept of representation but rather, through a particular form of linguistic praxis, to put into question—and with no less 'objective' rigor than a theoretical treatise—literary structure and its implications. To the extent that literary history/criticism is concerned with *not* being a priori inadequate to the texts it chooses as its object by submitting them to linguistic-theoretical and aesthetic conventions and with *not* applying to them standards whose validity is contested by the texts themselves, then openness toward this at first only logical possibility must be taken up into the heuristic principles of its procedure. This is not to say that literature then becomes a type of linguistic praxis *toto coelo* different from representation, but rather that—especially in the case of a series of its outstanding texts—it could put into question the methodological premises of literary history/criticism and furthermore those of philosophical aesthetics, rather than fitting into them without reservation. Where it does so, literature is no longer merely the object of literary history/criticism but, *ordo inverso*, an object of criticism by literature" ("Das Beben der Darstellung," in *Positionen der Literaturwissenschaft: Acht Modellanalysen am Beispiel von Kleists "Das Erdbeben in Chile"* ed. David E. Wellbery [Munich: Beck, 1985], pp. 149–50). Hamacher argues that formalism, to the extent that it is intelligible, is a type of representationalism and hence does not constitute a threat to literary history of the same trenchancy as poststructuralism. See n. 10 below.

    10. Not all literary *interpretation* is so deliberately antihistorical as the kinds of formalism I have mentioned; other types of interpretation plainly extrinsic or mimetic

> Graf . . . defends the literary historians, who bring us
> the "day's residue," as it were. Sadger's question as to
> how one can explain the poet's psyche from his works,
> which are distorted, is settled by the answer that science
> is not meant to explain anything but rather to give
> descriptions which leave no gaps.
>
> Minutes, Meeting 33, Psychoanalytical Society, 1907

The task of defining literary history in a sufficiently distinctive way becomes on reflection curiously difficult; for, as its degree of defini-

---

in bias can be said to produce literary historical miniatures. Indeed, very few formalist interpreters would deny the historical reference in their narratives in the sense of the political power at work in their own critical rhetoric, and so writing's *delay* (as between style and referent) seems always susceptible to *relay*, to reference. Conversely, not all kinds of literary history writing are (in principle) so deliberately antiformalist: a literary history might proceed immanently with respect to works of art, texts of style. Wellek and Warren agonize over this point. Their concern is to conceptualize a literary history that will not reify the literary phenomenon as an empirical fact and submit it to the power of sequences elaborated by "political, social, artistic and intellectual" historians. Therefore, they write, "our starting point must be the development of literature as literature. . . . [The] history [of a period] can be written only with reference to a scheme of values [that] has to be abstracted from history itself. . . . A period is not a type or class but a time section defined by a system of norms embedded in the historical process and irremovable from it" (TL 264–65). But this distinction is unclear. First problem: to what extent can "a scheme of values" be abstracted from "the historical process" and yet be exhibited as embedded in it and irremovable from it? Abstraction requires the mediation by concepts extrinsic to the matrix, the bed. Second, what precisely constitutes the bed? The answer for Wellek and Warren is individual literary works, but how does a group of works constitute a "historical process"? In this instance the historical process could refer only to the concrete differences between one work and another, but to identify differences does not constitute a process, which requires a theory of change, and this motive will not be found inside literary works. Later, in discussing the Russian formalist's historical venture of explaining changes in convention, Wellek and Warren write: "Why this change of convention has come about at a particular moment is a historical problem insoluble in general terms. . . . Literary change is a complex process, partly internal . . . but also partly external, *caused by social, intellectual and all other cultural changes*" (TL 266; my italics). We have returned to a poetics essentially shared by Gustave Lanson and, let us say, Ernst Robert Curtius and Rudolf Unger and Erich Auerbach. See in this connection Paul de Man's "Modern Poetics," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 518–20: "Social, intellectual and political history play a large part" in the works of Lanson; and like him, the German authors mentioned above "all start from the literary work as an unquestionable empirical fact."

tion increases vis-à-vis literary interpretation, so does its vulnerability to the (Nietzschean) critique of antitheses. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, Nietzsche attacks "the typical prejudgment and prejudice which give away the metaphysicians of all ages."[11] Metaphysicians oppose things with respect to their separate origins, these being—according to Nietzsche—one, "the lap of Being"; two, "this turmoil of delusion" (BW 200). Literary history would be subject to such a critique in appearing to claim an original foundation, an assured starting point, in the reality of the historical process. In this sense it is antithetical to formalist interpretation, which begins from an arbitrary place in a work avowedly fictive, nonempirical, and without self-identical being: "the literary work of art," for Wellek and Warren, is not "an empirical fact . . . neither real . . . nor mental" (TL 154, 156), and for Paul de Man, too, is "not a phenomenal event that can be granted any form of positive existence, whether as a fact of nature or as an act of the mind."[12] Nietzsche's doubt as to any certain "degree of apparentness" glooms the clarity with which the literary historian might view the ground of his discourse—the referent—and which now cannot be so readily extracted from turmoil, delusion, and error; and all literary history becomes a typifying of fictions by means of fictions (BW 236).

De Man's critique of Nietzsche's own literary historical practice in *The Birth of Tragedy* confirms this view. According to de Man, who writes in the allegedly deconstructive spirit of the later Nietzsche, the ground of literary history—the so-called realm of things, essences, and genetic totalities—is a delusion. Viewed in a suitably "ironic light," it dissolves into a world (in Nietzsche's terms, which I supply) "transitory, seductive, deceptive" (AR 100–102; BW 200). De Man links the seductiveness of Nietzsche's own literary-historical argument in *The Birth of Tragedy* to its many fictions, to its formal symmetries "easy enough to achieve in pictorial, musical or poetic fictions, but . . . never [able to] predict the occurrence of an historical event" (AR 84). Where in *The Birth of Tragedy* one might expect a referential discourse, a Dionysian discourse speaking of truth and falsity, we find instead a "theatrical fiction . . . compel[ling] the read-

11. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche,* ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1966), p. 200 (hereafter cited in this chapter as BW).
12. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism,* rev. 2d ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 107.

er to enter into an endless process of deconstruction" (AR 93, 99). Such an argument appears to destroy the possibility of literary history on the general grounds of the fictionality of the world—the main consequence being for de Man, who has learned from Nietzsche, that as the world and the text are both fictions, the ontological status of both remains suspended. Both fall away in their being to a vanishing point of indeterminable self-difference, which precludes firm reciprocal connections (AR 99).

Here, certainly, one might begin to dissociate this conclusion from Nietzsche's own, for Nietzsche's argument issues into a pragmatic revaluation of fictions according to their usefulness to life. The move cannot be made so rapidly, however. In *Beyond Good and Evil* we see Nietzsche confirming the view of an interminable suspension of meaning as between the text and the world of the author's lived experience. He does this by rejecting a counterargument to his previous critique of antithesis. The modern form of this counterargument would be as follows: There is a writing about the real—to which literary history belongs by virtue of the way it is founded. For one thing, it is founded differently from fiction in the sense of the wider generality, the collective nature, of its authorship or ownership, which includes its readership: that is, the collective manner in which it is produced and read. In literary history, as in epic narration but not as in modern prose (for Benjamin), many authors speak coherently through the nominal author as a chorus of voices responsive to the world.[13]

But at this point Nietzsche replies: "Why couldn't the world *that concerns us* be a fiction?" If so, then the world of the author's lived experience is itself a fiction, only a variation on the general thesis of the uncontrollable fictionality of the world—as indeed the author is himself or herself only a fiction. For "if somebody asked, 'but to a fiction there surely belongs an author?'—couldn't one answer simply:

13. "In epic a people are at rest after the day's work is done—harking, dreaming, and collecting. The novelist has departed from his people and its concerns. The birthplace of the novel is the solitude of the individual who cannot express in exemplary fashion his chiefest predilections, is himself without counsel and can counsel no one. To write a novel is to take to the extreme the representation of the incommensurable in human existence" (Walter Benjamin, "Krisis des Romans," in *Gesammelte Schriften: Kritiken und Rezensionen,* ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartles [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981], 3:230–31).

why? Doesn't this 'belongs' perhaps belong to the fiction, too?" (BW 237). It is, however, the author as a determinate spatial and temporal being who, for almost every literary historian, focuses—indeed, institutes—the connection between the fiction and the historical world; he or she is the way they belong together; he or she is "the true unit of literary history."[14] Hence, when Nietzsche denies the proprietary connection between the work and the author's lived experience of the world, announcing what today is called "the death of the author," he eliminates the chief referent in historical narrative.[15]

Nietzsche's critique of the author jeopardizes even an author viewed collectively or transpersonally, eliminating the possibility of a literary history of the kind foreseen by Foucault. Let us agree, à la Foucault, to stop asking of the literary work the "tiresome" question, what does the work "reveal of [the author's] most profound self?" and ask instead, "Who controls the discourse" of which the work is a node, a virtual focus of forces?[16] But then, by the factor of agency implied in the metaphor of the "who," we have again reintroduced a type of productive intention, however unconscious, to which the work refers. Thus Nietzsche's destruction of the link between work and author destroys the transpersonal literary history even of the kind implied in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where the "authors" are metaphysical agents—Apollo and Dionysus—and the self constituted by the work is not empirical but transcendental. Even the metaphysically authored tragedy "belongs to" Dionysus and Apollo: with the destruction of the idea of belonging, the idea of referent-as-cause is destroyed.

We must, however, look further on, past this point profiled by de Man, at which Nietzsche destroys the belonging relation between author and work. In a famous gesture—on the strength of his wonder

14. The quotation is from Robert Rehder, "Re-Thinking Literary History," in *The Teaching of Literature in ASAIHL Universities,* ed. Anthony Tatlow (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983), p. 20. I say that the author is the true unit of literary history for *almost* every historian, in order to make room for Heidegger, who in *Holzwege* and elsewhere, suggests a history of poetry that jumps over the empirical existence of poets and constitutes or connects to a history of Being.

15. "One should guard against confusion through psychological *contiguity* . . . a confusion to which an artist himself is only too prone: as if he himself were what he is able to represent, conceive, and express. The fact is that if he were it, he would not represent, conceive, and express it. . . . Whoever is completely and wholly an artist is to all eternity separated from the 'real,' the actual" (BW 537).

16. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice,* p. 138.

at what he is left with—and a bold surmise, Nietzsche makes a tool out of a fragment of the shattered fable of the true world and with it opens up a sphere of activity for the will. For if all so-called descriptions of the true world are themselves informed by "deception, selfishness, and lust," and to this extent are interpretive fictions, precisely therefore all forms of literary realism, including literary historical writing, are "insidiously related, tied to and involved with . . . seemingly opposite things"—that is to say, with the interpretation of fiction. The distinction between the two modes of writing is therefore itself only one of "degrees and many subtleties of gradation"; and these gradations, like those between the text of style and the historical moment, can be articulated or erased by a self in the sense that all interpretations are involved in a subduing of the phenomenon to purposes imposed by a will to power (BW 225, 513). "Like a sea of forces . . . [the will] returns from the play of contradictions to the joy of concord."[17] This description from *The Will to Power* is faithful to Nietzsche's own practice as a "historian" who in his cultural histories displays the willfulness and fictionality of his constructions: for example, in the capsule history of the pseudo-antitheses good/bad and good/evil in Section II of *The Genealogy of Morals* (BW 489–90). I would stress the word "narrator," however, over "historian," for Nietzsche substitutes for history writing a type of historicized allegory, a diachronic play of recurrent fictions of master and slave having heuristic force.

*   *   *

Kafka's critique of antithesis, of the antithetical logic of literary history, has more restrictive consequences. About "antitheses" Kafka wrote, "My repugnance for [them] is certain. . . . They make for thoroughness, fullness, completeness, but only like a figure on the 'wheel of life' [a toy with a revolving wheel]; we have chased our little idea around the circle. They [antitheses] are as undifferentiated as they are different" (DI 157). Kafka's repugnance for antitheses at once undifferentiated and different impugns the procedure of literary history, for the opposition that literary historical language will go on

17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 550 (hereafter cited in this chapter as WP).

talking of is the (provisional) antithesis of style and referent, as to source and modality of evidence. It then proceeds to undifferentiate this antithesis, to show how every stylistic effect is actually the effect of a cause independent of style—a parent cause, which its effect resembles. By this logic (to give an example), one of Kafka's signatures—his "open metaphors"—might be historically explained . . . by aviation, via Filippo Marinetti's destruction of analogy: "Aviationary rapidity has multiplied our knowledge of the world: hence knowledge by means of analogy will be more and more natural. And so one must suppress the terms 'as [*wie*],' 'like [*gleich*],' 'just as [*ebenso wie*],' 'similarly [*ähnlich*].'"[18]

Kafka's resistance to literary history, however, is attached to a syncope of a more radical kind, one that differentiates absolutely. Unlike Nietzsche, Kafka asserts the absolute and unbridgeable distinction between what he calls in various ways the sensory and the allegorical worlds. And unlike Nietzsche, his attachment to the opposition of sense and spirit precisely involves holding on to the concept of property, of "belonging to." For Kafka, the concept of belonging to, in the relation of language and referent, is not a fiction; it is necessarily the case. It allows him to identify negatively the language of the referent, of history, and to devalue it: language, "corresponding as it does to the phenomenal world, . . . is concerned only with property and its relations." Only when language is used in an allusive or, as I understand the word, allegorical manner (*andeutungsweise*), and not in a metaphorical manner (*vergleichsweise*), can it identify things of the spirit (DF 40). Thus Kafka, according to Kafka, writes a kind of allegory without historical power, with the diachronic element entirely suppressed. "It is only our conception of time that makes us call the Last Judgment by this name. It is, in fact, a kind of court martial" (DF 38). The concept of belonging to, of referent and property, lends Kafka's perspective a stability that only further jeopardizes a history writing aspiring to be about the phenomenal world and literature. For the truth of literature lies outside the phenomenal world. Kafka's language gains the ascetic freedom of allegory by identifying the real concept of property—that is, of its

18. Filippo Marinetti, "Die futuristische Literatur: Technisches Manifest," *Der Sturm* 3 (October 1912): 194; quoted in Herbert Kraft, *Kunst und Wirklichkeit im Expressionismus* (Bebenhausen: Rotsch, 1972), p. 13.

own "belonging to the world"—as the obstacle to its writing immediately about true things.

Kafka rejects literary-historical writing on the ground that such writing feeds the metaphor whose lie starves him—namely, that the German word *Sein* (being) means "belonging to him," his property (DF 39). This *Sein/sein* metaphor—the familial or genealogical metaphor—is the very figure that literary history writing employs in practice. The being of the literary work is identified with its descent from a paternal referent as its proper source.

Finally, in a passage that plainly identifies the logic of literary history with genealogy, Kafka explicitly repudiates the literary historical recovery of his works. In the series of aphorisms called "He," a pronoun I take to refer to the author, Kafka writes:

> All that he does seems to him, it is true, extraordinarily new, but also, because of the incredible spate of new things, extraordinarily amateurish, indeed scarcely tolerable, incapable of becoming history, breaking short the chain of the generations, cutting off for the first time at its most profound source the music of the world, which before him could at least be divined. Sometimes in his arrogance he has more anxiety for the world than for himself. [GW 263–64][19]

Kafka, "He," figures as the angel destructive of history, a producer of things that cannot be drawn into the history of the world or the progress of its generations. In his works, says Kafka, the music of the world ceases to sound. Their music is not the music of the world, their world is not the world, is not its echo or copy. Moreover, these

19. The apparent surprise at the outset of the passage is the link between work that is original and work that is dilettantish: i.e., that appeals chiefly for the delight it gives. The connection of bizarre originality and delight is actually, however, a recurrent one in Kafka, who in his famous letter to Max Brod of July 5, 1922, links the writing destiny (*Schriftstellersein*) with a mania for pleasure (*Genußsucht*) and for this reason damns it as "devil's work" (L 332–35). His works are outlandishly novel, products of a bizarre and unfamiliar sexuality, so heavy with selfish delight that for the historical medium ("the chain of generations") they are "insupportable"; they cannot be borne. At times (in an associated prose poem) Kafka can reckon his life and thought as actually constituting "a formal necessity . . . of a family superabundant in life" (GW 269). Not here. These products sink through the familiar life of generations, interrupting history, breaking off the music of the world. In sinking they return, as "devilish," to their source: *nach unten*, "underground." See my "Kafka's Other Metamorphosis," in *Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance: Centenary Readings*, ed. Alan Udoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

works cannot be included within a family, are deeply unfamiliar; they cannot be grasped as the offspring of a parent and cannot themselves be expected to produce further offspring, literary families.

What features of Kafka's works, for being "extraordinarily new," so deeply resist historical recovery? Here one could return to de Man's essay on Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, which also stresses the resistance of literature to literary history. De Man's point is that the actual performance of Nietzsche's narration opposes any model of the dialectical production of meaning according to the figure of sublated antithesis. That is because, first, of the aphoristic character of individual sections and, second, of the fact—according to de Man—that a reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* must include the notes and jottings, the paralipomena, surrounding it. Nietzsche's "narrative continuous texts" depend for their meaning on "discontinuous aphoristic formulations" (AR 101). Following de Man's lead, we would be led to the impossibility in Kafka's fiction, too, of establishing the discursive wholeness of traditional narrative: namely, the distinctiveness of beginning and end, whole and part, cause and effect. Kafka's work eschews the operation of a genetic principle involving "subject, intent, negation, totalization, supported by underlying metaphysical categories of identity and presence" (AR 81).

Let us look, then, at the feature of Kafka's rhetoric potentially most obstructive of dialectic, the figure of reversal itself. I focus on a kind of chiasm that might be considered Kafka's signature. A typical Kafkan chiasm reads: "In the struggle between yourself and the world second the world" (DF 39). The aphorism seems at first glance to conclude decisively by reversing the priority of the self to the world; the self now stands in "second" position. The logic of this chiasm would then be progressive and final, the second half of the chiasm decisively reversing the sense of the first by reversing the relation of its terms. On this reading, the identity of the terms holds steady, and only their relation is reversed: he or she who once confronted the adversary now stands behind the same adversary, seconding that adversary.

But, of course, a moment's reflection shows that there is more motion in this chiasm than meets the eye. For if the term "you" means "duelist with the world," and if the terms in the second half of the chiasm are the same as the first, then the duelist seconding the

world can second it only for the sake of the duel that he or she is obliged to win and thus only for his or her own party. The seconder comes first. A self consents to accept the primacy of the world on the self's own terms according to the eternally recursive logic of Romantic irony. Furthermore, if the duelist in question is also capable of being at once duelist and second, then from the start the world is capable of being seconded and hence is not adversary. The chiasm must be thought further along, as a result of the fact that the self included in it functions not to stabilize it, not to organize and master its sense, but to launch it through never-ending turns of spiraling reflection.

Here is another example of a Kafkan chiasm flung by the self within it along new turns of reflection. Kafka composed the following gnome within a gnome:

> On the handle of Balzac's walking-stick: I break all obstacles.
> On mine: All obstacles break me.
> The common factor is "all."
>
> (Auf Balzacs Spazierstockgriff: Ich breche alle Hindernisse.
> Auf meinem: Mich brechen alle Hindernisse.
> Gemeinsam ist das "alle.")
>
> [DF 250; H 281]

The pure chiastic form of this opposition would read: "I shatter all obstacles; / [axis of reversal] all obstacles shatter me [Ich breche alle Hindernisse. / Alle Hindernisse brechen mich]." Semantically, this version is the same as the one Kafka actually wrote: both assert the reversal of the relation of dominance between the self and the adversary world. What is important in Kafka's actual phrasing, however, is the slight deviation, engendering movement, between the paradigmatic meaning of the concluding sentence and the implication of its syntagmatic form. Here we have to consult the German text: "Ich breche alle Hindernisse. . . . Mich brechen alle Hindernisse." The allegedly broken self—called "me [*mich*]"—holds fast to the first position in the concluding clause, which is the position of the Balzacian self in the lead sentence. As a result, the impression is produced that the hand which inscribes the motto of its own impotence on the stick head intends to testify to a remainder of its own power—the power of authorship. It does so even when this remainder consists

only of the ability to perceive and note down precisely the ruins that shore it up. This tenacious survival of a negative authority has, however, a chiefly dispersive effect. For if so little power—so merely feigned a power of breaking obstacles by inscription—attaches to the aphoristic inscription of being broken, and hence there is nothing at all victorious for either party in that acknowledgment, then the aphoristic formulation itself would as such be something broken. And therefore it would certainly not have been proved that "all obstacles break me." In the way the chiasm includes the authorial self, which strides about in the frame of the aphorism in "*my* walking stick," it acquires a virtual endlessness.

The point is confirmed, I believe, when we consider that the aphorism ends not with the concluding sentence of the chiasm but with a commentary on it. Kafka says about the relation between the lead and the concluding sentence, "The common factor is 'all.'" What is held in common, therefore, is neither the first term nor the second. Balzac's "I" is not like the "I" (literally, the *mich*) of Kafka. Of course this disparity comes as no great surprise, for the pronoun "I" in this text or any other has a chiefly deictic sense: it points back to the person or scriptor, or to an aspect of the person or scriptor. In the first instance it points back to the scriptor Balzac but only remotely to the person; in the second instance it points back to the scriptor Kafka as a live mask of the person Kafka, the creator of this entire language game. This explicit relation of pronoun to author confirms the idea that the apparently binary chiasm develops from the intervention of a third factor. Kafka's genuine wisdom: Always triangulate! Furthermore, neither is the second term of both parts of the chiasm, called "obstacles," shared throughout the chiasm; Kafka insists on a disparity between even those parts where two identical signifers (the term "obstacles") are found in the same syntagmatic position. This insistence on difference at any cost is compatible with the intention of each and every Kafkan chiasm: to set in motion behind the apparent constancy of its expression a movement of thought that spirals on through endless reversals.

But no reader can have the experience of endless reversals: infinity is counterfactual. What, then, practically speaking, determines the point at which this chiasm breaks off . . . into meaning? Is it just as K. thinks, in *The Castle*, apropos of the value of the texts that the mes-

senger Barnabas delivers: "They themselves change in value per-
petually, the reflections they give rise to are endless, and *chance* deter-
mines where one stops reflecting, and so even our estimate of them is
a matter of chance" (C 216; my italics)?[20] To speak against this grim
conclusion is another famous moment in Kafka's spiritual autobiog-
raphy, which begins with exactly the opposite sense of the chiasm of
self and world—the world as the self's "seconder":

> From a certain stage of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] on, weariness, insuffi-
> ciency, constriction, self-contempt must all vanish: namely at the point
> where I have the strength to recognize as my own nature what pre-
> viously was something alien to myself that refreshed me, satisfied,
> liberated, and exalted me. [DF 91]

The aphorism does not close on this optimistic note of natural *Bildung*,
however. It proceeds to put into question the very intelligibility, in
Kafka's case, of the distinction between "self" and "other": Kafka
may not allow "the otherness [*die Fremde*], which . . . [he] is, to cease
to be other. To do this is to . . . refute himself" (DF 91–92). His
difference from the world must be absolute. Chance, as we saw in the
previous chapter, might produce a sensation of life force but not
obviously a heightened sense of self: "Every remark by someone else,
every chance look throws everything in me over on the other side,
even what has been forgotten, even what is entirely insignificant. I
am more uncertain than I ever was, I feel only the power of life" (DI
309).

The famous diary entry figuring as a sort of preface to all such re-
flections plainly identifies the chiastic logic of reversal and recursion:

> This pursuit . . . [by introspection of every idea] carries one in a direc-
> tion away from . . . [mankind]. Or I can—can I?—manage to keep my
> feet somewhat and be carried along in the wild pursuit? Where, then,
> shall I be brought? "Pursuit," indeed, is only a metaphor. I can also
> say, "assault on the last earthly frontier," an assault, moreover,
> launched from below, from mankind, and since this too is a metaphor,
> I can replace it by the metaphor of an assault from above, aimed at me
> from above. [DII 202]

20. See my *Fate of the Self: German Writers and French Theory* (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1986), p. 179.

This passage stresses the uncertainty of Kafkan metaphor before producing its chiasm by the arbitrary action of replacing the first metaphor by the second. This rhetorical technique of arbitrary substitution and reversal could make us consider as an only willful construction the recurrent metaphor of the duel in which the combatant seconds his worldly adversary. It could arise as a quasi-automatic reversal of a banal wisdom-sentence about a subjectivity: that is, in the struggle between yourself and the world, second yourself. It would therefore be hard to see how such rhetorical figures could be made to yield a body of meanings and positions referable to Kafka's historical moment.

And yet it is remarkable, as I have stressed, that the passage about Kafka's assault on the frontiers concludes with an extravagant claim to meaning. "All such writing [read, chiastic writing] is an assault on the frontiers; if Zionism had not intervened, it might easily have developed into a new secret doctrine, a Kabbalah." In the preceding chapter I read this claim as authorizing, precisely, the formation of a self: the passage as a whole connects "introspection," the "I," and the act of writing as aspects of a single being having the truth and prestige of Kabbalah. But now I must stress the usurpatory element, which in fact condemned this enterprise to uncertainty: "If Zionism had not intervened. . . ." And since Zionism had been around all during Kafka's life, it is impossible to discount the operation of chance in this intervention. Self-constitution in Kafka is a matter of chance and arises essentially to reiterate a defense against the surmise that the Other is only death and extinction.

I cite finally a Kafkan chiasm so Nietzschean in its style that it may be viewed as Kafka's definitive reversal of Nietzsche. It is the stunning aphorism "The animal wrests the whip from its master and whips itself in order to become master, not knowing that this is only a fantasy produced by a new knot in the master's whiplash" (DF 37, 323). On the face of it, this chiasm conforms to Nietzsche's analysis of the will to power: it is the master who engenders the fantastic consciousness of the enslaved animal. Such an analysis might be adequate if the concept of mastery exhibited in it were a simple one, but it is not. The aphorism presupposes a notion of genuine mastery, of which we actually know only this much: whatever its content might

be, it can never have anything in common with the animal's fantasy, which is a blind reaction to the lash. But how can such a notion of mastery actually be conceived in its superiority to, and independence from, the fantasy of the animal? With what mastery does the aphorism demystify the mastery of which the animal dreams and keep him a servant who does not know what his master does?[21]

Nietzsche's myth differs importantly from Kafka's. The slave type achieves a real mastery in time; this victory is recounted in *On the Genealogy of Morals* by a narrator who writes with the authority of the slave grown entirely lucid. The concept of mastery evoked by the freedman-narrator in Nietzsche is supposed to be true—a strong fiction and not a compensatory fantasy.

But Kafka's aphorism offers no *concept* of mastery—a case, of course, that might be quite appropriate to Kafka's horror of all forms of mastery. "Among all writers," as Elias Canetti remarked, "Kafka is the greatest expert on power," yet this expertness arose from his rigorous adoption of the standpoint of the humbled, unmitigated by a leaguing identification with others humbled.[22] Kafka's aphorism on mastery actually produces a *reflection* on power, a reflection in principle infinite. This reflection arises from the absence of a standpoint from which the aphorism, which speaks of a triumphal use of power, is narrated. Nietzsche worked out the narrative standpoint of his aphorism in terms of a self bent on mastery. In Kafka's case, what survives the aphorism is chiefly a question: from what standpoint, with what knowledge, is this narrator speaking? Does writing such aphorisms itself amount to anything more than a new knot on the master's whiplash? If the lash can acquire a new knot, it can acquire one more knot and still others thereafter. Indeed, Kafka wrote in 1917, "The whips with which we lash each other have put forth many

21. John 15:9–17.
22. Elias Canetti, *Der andere Prozeß: Kafkas Briefe an Felice* (Munich: Hanser, 1969), p. 76. "There is something deeply exciting about this stubborn attempt of someone who was helpless, to exclude himself from power in any form" (p. 75). Canetti's penetrating study of Hitler identifies the slavery of the being who strives at all points to "outdo [*übertreffen*]" his fellows: "Each enterprise of his and even his deepest wishes are dictated by a compulsion to outdo: One may go so far as to say that he is a *slave of outdoing*. But he is by no means alone in that. If we had to sum up the essence of our society in a single feature, we could simply point out: the compulsion to outdo" (Elias Canetti, *The Conscience of Words*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel [London: André Deutsch, 1986], p. 70).

knots these five years" (DII 187). This means that if the time-honored ethical concept of mastery through self-flagellation is only a fantasy, then the demystifying critique of the concept may also be a fantasy. The idea that self-flagellation is not a genuine self-overcoming may itself be a new knot—the newest but not the last—on the master's, not the narrator's, whiplash. In this way the meaning of the aphorism that speaks of the continually increasing power of the master under-cuts itself: of the master, and whether he genuinely swings a whip, nothing is known. "We are permitted," Kafka wrote, "to crack that whip, the will, over us with our own hand" (DII 166)—but who or what gives this permission? The chiasm is constructed to be her-meneutically endless: the positions of master and whip, of animal and fantasy, replace one another chiastically, incessantly.[23]

The thrust in Nietzsche of the master-and-slave parable is realist and final. Nietzsche's version produces between the two positions "degrees and subtleties of gradation" of distinguishable power. It might be objected, of course, that Nietzsche's own constructions of power are, on scrutiny, as unsettling as Kafka's and that they too are chiasmi without conceptual or affective unity. Typically, the master who is defined by his pathos of distance from the slave is by the same token defined by the slave; at the very origin of his *Selbstgefühl,* his sense of self, is the feeling of his distance from an Other. Does not this play of reversals divide the legendary wholeness of the master?

There is another striking example of chiastic reversal in consecutive aphorisms from *Beyond Good and Evil.* Nietzsche defines the soul as "a social structure of the drives and affects" and then the body as a "social structure composed of many souls." The integration of this chiasm produces this conclusion: The soul is a social structure of the drives; these drives together constitute a body, which is a social struc-

23. Jacques Derrida writes of the procedure of deconstruction as follows: "To 'deconstruct' philosophy is thus to work through the structured genealogy of its concepts in the most scrupulous and immanent fashion, but at the same time to determine, from a certain external perspective that it cannot name or describe, what this history may have concealed or excluded, constituting itself as history through this repression in which it has a stake" (*Positions* [Paris: Minuit, 1972], pp. 15–16; quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982], p. 86). Kafka's aphorism enacts this procedure in exemplary fashion at the same time that it sets into sharper relief than does Derrida's statement the totally unsettling consequence of working through a genealogy of concepts from an "external perspective that it cannot name or describe."

ture of souls. Soul is a social structure of souls, body a social structure of drives. Each category is tautological, and they are held together only by a polemical and playful willfulness. Yet this reversal nonetheless forecasts the chiasm which, like a wreck at the bottom of the sea of Nietzsche's thought, casts its menacing shadow upward through the lighter waters: this is the chiasm of resentment. The strong man generates resentment in the weak, yet the resentment of the weak makes man an interesting and therefore a strong animal. How could one escape this reversal? Have we reached the point at which Nietzsche reverses position into Kafka's and there is no longer a distinction between them?

The difference is present in Nietzsche's unifying notion of self: "No 'substance,' rather something that in itself strives after greater strength, and that wants to 'preserve' itself only indirectly (it wants to surpass itself)" (WP 270). If Nietzsche is celebrated for having deconstructed the ego fiction, it is often overlooked that he is a great affirmer of the self. In *Zarathustra* it is "the creative self . . . which creates value and will"—that "granite of spiritual *fatum*, really 'deep down' at the bottom" of our being.[24] Nietzsche conceives a self that holds together, in a life-enhancing relation of distinction and priority, opposite implications of the chiasm as a figure of thought and will. What is immediately telling, too, is Nietzsche's acknowledgment of the real historical conjuncture that determines the interpretative activity of his self. For him the fate of the self means not its story but its integrity, in defiance of the painful dislocations following from the injuries he suffered in the Franco-Prussian War.

An exhilarating passage from *The Gay Science* suggests a comparison between Nietzsche's and Kafka's attitude toward the operation of chance in interpretation. Nietzsche celebrates a mood of coherence linking his writing and the world; it is one marked by an abundance of signs, all immediately significant. "Whatever it is, bad weather or good, the loss of a friend, sickness, slander, the failure of some letter to arrive, the spraining of an ankle, a glance into a shop, a counter-argument, the opening of a book, a dream, a fraud—either immediately or very soon after it proves to be something that "must

24. *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 147; and BW 352.

not be missing"; it has a profound significance and use precisely for *us*." The significance might best be understood as the expert, dexterous labor of an interpretative consciousness, but chance is also at work lightening the labor: "Indeed, now and then someone plays with us—good old chance; now and then chance guides our hand, and the wisest providence could not think up a more beautiful music than that which our foolish hand produces then."[25]

In Kafka's Castle-world the chance moment that breaks off interpretation is associated with an all-pervasive fatigue; in Nietzsche's Genoa, with "great health." The difference is produced in Nietzsche by a mastering self exterior to signs—an appropriator of them. Philosophers, he wrote, "lack that *impersonal* participation in a problem of knowledge; as they are through and through themselves a person, so too all their insights and knowledge grow together to become a person, to a living complex, whose individual parts depend on one another, interpenetrate, are nourished in common, which, as a whole, has a unique aura and a unique aroma. . . . If one stops them from building their own nest, they perish, like birds without shelter."[26]

We conclude, then, that Nietzsche produces chiastic structures as daring closure by acts of interpretation. The strong self arrests the recursive play within the figure. It follows, therefore, that chiastic aphorisms having the form of a struggle for authority between the self and the world must end without irony and with affirmation of the self. "This highest degree of self-possession deprives an individual of all particularities—except the very one of being master and center of himself." He is a "sort of system complete in itself, completing itself continually."[27] This point should be understood strongly: the self is

25. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. 223–24 (hereafter cited in this chapter as GS).

26. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden,* ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1954–56), 1:943.

27. Ibid., 1:407. Cf. "Why I Am So Clever," in *Ecce Homo:* "Meanwhile the organizing 'idea' that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down—it begins to command; slowly it leads us *back* from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares *single* qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as means toward a whole—one by one, it trains all *subservient* capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, 'goal,' 'aim,' 'meaning'" (BW 710).

the being that lives beyond truth, beyond belief in one true historical meaning; the self lives as a maker of fictions from history for life.[28]

It follows further that the heuristic antithesis and finite chiasm of literary history writing are themselves fictions, although they permit coordination (narrative) within the universal field of fictions. Indeed it is impossible that these terms of style and referent, self and world, would not be "insidiously related, tied to, and involved" with each other (BW 200). Thus Nietzsche authorizes a literary history, with the provision that the family resemblance it produces between the fiction and the historical reality is itself a fiction. This is not finally literary *history*.

Kafka, on the other hand, maintains his repugnance for weak antitheses yet is captivated by the great antithesis of the sensory and allegorical worlds. Nietzsche's critique of antithesis is that it does not sufficiently respect the fact of intertwining; Kafka's horror of antithesis is that it does not sufficiently respect the fact of separation. Kafka disclaims the possibility of literary history through a consciousness fiercely divided between allegory and the language of the sensory world. This division is active in the perpetual undecidability of his aphorisms in the form of chiasmi. Kafka's "self," he stresses, is a precipitate of the acts of chance that break off interpretation, and hence it is not a self. "Self-control is something for which I do not strive. Self-control means wanting to be effective at some random [*zufälligen*] point in the infinite radiations of my spiritual existence" (DF 37; H 42). This view is consistent with another strong view of Kafka's, that his self is precipitated by the distractions of experience from his native desire to die.

Like K., Kafka the writer also accedes to chance, especially as it engenders breaks in the narrative perspective of his novels and stories.[29] There is a kind of self-construction in Kafka's accession—like K.'s—to chance, but it is unlike the dance of self and chance in Nietzsche. Kafka means to affirm his indifference to the concerns of a practical, world-mastering, empirical consciousness. His self is de-

---

28. "Nietzsche's purpose was to destroy belief in a historical past from which men might learn any single, substantial truth" (Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* [Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973], p. 332).

29. See my *Fate of the Self*, pp. 176–77.

fined not by particular interests but by its narrating attentiveness to
the products of a dream play in which he is the dreamer. The self is
precisely its lucid tolerance of whatever arises in the place where
control, for the sake of mastery and reward, has been relinquished.[30]
This view contrasts sharply with what we recall of Nietzsche's de-
scription of the self forming itself through acts of mastery. Kafka
returns to the point of the nonsingle subject: "In one and the same
human being there are cognitions [*Erkenntnisse*] that, however utterly
dissimilar they are, yet have one and the same object, so that one can
only conclude that there are different subjects in one and the same
human being" (DF 42; H47).

The historian, of course, is not bound to the claims of Nietzsche
and Kafka: What does he or she make of their difference? If the
historian reads these two writers together in the manner of Kafka,
then his or her view of their relation is one of interminable irony: the
distinction between Nietzsche on self and fiction and Kafka on chance
and truth is itself firm only as a matter of chance. On the one hand,
there cannot be a literary history, because the difference between
these two writers is undecidable by a self. On the other hand, the
historian writing like Nietzsche could seize the power to arrest this
irony. A strong mode of reading the difference between these writers
would reverse the distinction that Kafka makes. We could dare to
read Kafka's asserted love of the totality of the historical truth exactly
in the manner of Nietzsche writing on "the historical sense." Here is
Nietzsche:

> If one could *endure* . . . the losses, hopes, conquests, and the victories
> of humanity; if one could finally contain all this in one soul and crowd
> it into a single feeling—this would surely have to result in a happiness
> that humanity has not known so far: the happiness of a god full of
> power and love. [GS 268]

And here is a fuller statement of Kafka's experience of world encom-
passment:

> I feel too tightly constricted in everything that signifies Myself: even
> the eternity that I am is too tight for me. But if, for instance, I read a
> good book, say, an account of travels, it rouses me, satisfies me,
> suffices me. Proofs that previously I did not include this book in my

30. Ibid., p. 267.

> eternity, or had not pushed on far enough ahead to have an intuitive glimpse of the eternity that necessarily includes this book as well.— From a certain stage of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] on, weariness, insufficiency, constriction, self-contempt must all vanish: namely, at the point where I have the stength to recognize as my own nature what previously was something alien to myself that refreshed me, satisfied, liberated, and exalted me. [DF 91]

True, the passage, as I stressed earlier, is incomplete; it proceeds to disparage the weak Hegelian rigor of its terms and undercut its ambition. But this movement does not rule out a Kafkan hero who dares to substitute himself for chance, and Kafka has indeed illustrated such a figure in K. in *The Castle*.

Here is an example of K.'s daring. The relation of K. to the castle can figure as a form of truth-seeking. Entry into the castle is entry into the truth of things. In such a metaphor, the distinctive quality of interpersonal relations is carried over into the relation of knower and known: the known is figured as *acknowledging* the knower. Where there is truth, there is reciprocal recognition.

An early passage speaks this way of K.'s serious acceptance of the quest and struggle for admission to the castle: "So the Castle had recognized him as the Land Surveyor. That was unpropitious for him, on the one hand, for it meant that the Castle was well informed about him, had estimated all the probable chances, and was taking up the challenge with a smile" (C 12).

The metaphor restates the failure of knowledge in approximately these Faustian terms: All you know of the spiritual object is what you assume; it is not me. The truth condescends to be known not as it is in itself but in the manner appropriate to the human subject, a manner that does not jeopardize it. Truth can be known only as what it is not.

But this point, for Kafka, requires adjustment. The condescension of truth figures parabolically in *The Castle* as only one side of K.'s experience. "On the other hand," writes Kafka of the readiness of the Castle to take up the struggle, "it was quite propitious, for if his interpretation were right they had underestimated his strength, and he would have more freedom of action than he had dared to hope. And if they expected to cow him by their lofty superiority in recognizing him as Land Surveyor, they were mistaken; it made his skin prickle a little [he felt a slight shudder, *es überschauerte ihn leicht*], that

was all" (C 12; R 484). There is a Promethean, an altogether usurpatory, feeling to such parables of selfhood in their very independence of Halakah.[31]

Here I am reading Kafka, through K., as himself daring, with a shudder, the defiant acts of arrest and comprehension that constitute a self. This is a Nietzschean Kafka. Equally, readers aware of the New Nietzsche, the "nomadic" Nietzsche of Deleuze and Foucault, will recall that a good case can be made for reading Nietzsche's self as "Kafkan": not as a maker of fictions but as itself a fiction, which would then have to be said to be constructed by chance. Such a self belongs, in Gottfried Benn's words, to Nietzsche's "astronomy"— the disruption of "chance, the uncaused event, the scattering of errors."[32] The self is not exterior to its fictions. Both Nietzsche and Kafka contain the possibility of reversal with respect to each other's position on reversal.

There would appear then to be no theory possible of a final reversal establishing a decisive difference between these writers that could not itself be reversed by each one's own theory of infinite reversibility. Nietzsche's self accommodates chance, Kafka's chance precipitates a self. A literary history including Nietzsche and Kafka halts before the interminable reversal, the unstable chiasm, indwelling their positions. This chiastic motion produces a vortex within the textual field where will and chance collide, spinning every sentence on its axis.[33] What is the empirical referent of the negativity of the pivot on which Nietzsche's and Kafka's parallels, to quote Kafka, "like a weather vane" thus turn round "entirely in the opposite direction [into an element wholly opposed, *ins Entgegengesetzte*]" (DI 26; T 21)? Where do we

31. This is what Walter Benjamin was the first, rightly, to perceive; it speaks on behalf of his own intellectual daring. See my essay (with Michael Jennings) "Walter Benjamin/Gershom Scholem *Briefwechsel, 1933–1940*," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 12 (May, September 1984): 357–66.

32. Gottfried Benn, "Nietzsche nach fünfzig Jahren," in *Gesammelte Werke: Essays, Reden, Vortrage* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1977), 1:490.

33. Cf. Paul de Man: "Chiasmus . . . can only come into being as the result of a void, of a lack that allows for the rotating motion of the polarities" (AR 49). In my essay "Kafka's Double Helix," *Literary Review* 26 (Summer 1983): 521–33, I point out the association of the pivot in Kafka's chiasmi not with "lack" but with the term of the "world" as the not-self and also with the term of death. But "the world" cannot have a finite historical referent; in such a referent the worldhood of the world remains invisible. The same philosophical difficulty attaches to a historical representation of death.

find in history the shaft on which that arrow turns, and how confine precisely the wound the arrow makes, so that with Kafka it might be "enough" to say, "the arrow . . . fit[s] exactly into it" (DII 206)? That spinning pivot—the wound it inflicts and the vertigo it induces—is the scandal and the provocation of literary history.