SEVERAL entries in Kafka’s diaries and notebooks show what a fascination the ancient myths had for him. He writes and re-writes his versions of them, clearly looking for some meaning, relating them to his own experience. The one legend he comes back to again and again is the biblical myth of the Fall of Man. How is man related to the gods? The writer’s search for form is the pursuit of this relationship; Kafka has no difficulty at all in seeing himself as a modern Prometheus. In his notebooks he reviews what he describes as four versions of the story of Prometheus; his subjective conclusion leads us directly to the inexplicable surface of his fiction:


Kafka presents here the apparent contradiction we must learn to expect from him: a foundation of truth must lead to the inexplicable. The only thing he specifically calls inexplicable is

1 A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, 11 March 1970.
2 H. p. 100. Abbreviations in the footnotes refer to the following publications by Franz Kafka, published by S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main:

H. = Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande, 1953.
T. = Tagebücher, 1951.
P. = Der Prozeß, 1951.
S. = Das Schloß, 1951.
F. = Briefe an Felice, 1967.
M. = Briefe an Milena, 1952.

Also: J. = Gustav Janouch, Gespräche mit Kafka, Frankfurt, S. Fischer, 1951.
the range of rocks. To us this must seem the only element in
the story which is familiar and immediately acceptable. We
look out of the window and see a range of rocks. In the story it
is the one common element, the setting for the gods, for Prome-
theus, for the eagles. It joins gods and men. And this is the
environment, now as then. Is the rock any more explicable for
the scientific analysis which reduces it to parts, and the parts to
further parts?

It was in September 1912 that Kafka wrote his story Das
Urteil in one night. "Das Gespenst einer Nacht", he called
it. At last, he felt, he had managed to release, in one swift,
unified action, the secret powers which tormented him. He had
great affection for this story. He read it to his friends. He took
pains about its publication, selecting the type-face as a priest
would select vestments. Here was utterance, form at last. In the
morning after this night of creation he exclaimed in his diary: "Wie
alles gesagt werden kann, wie für alle, für die fremdesten Einfälle
ein großes Feuer bereitet ist, in dem sie vergehn und auferstehn." And later in the same paragraph: "Nur so kann geschrieben
werden, nur in einem solchen Zusammenhang, mit solcher
vollständigen Öffnung des Leibes und der Seele." 2

So this was truth, revelation. But what does the story mean?
Kafka himself did not know, in spite of his excitement; perhaps
because of his excitement. He tried to explain certain features
of it, but soon had to confess (in a letter of June 1913 to Felice
Bauer) that the total "meaning" was as obscure to him as to
anyone else: "Findest Du im 'Urteil' irgendeinen Sinn, ich
meine irgendeinen geraden, zusammenhängenden, verfolgbaren
Sinn? Ich finde ihn nicht und kann auch nichts darin erklären." 3
A week later he had gone beyond a lament for his own inability
to explain the story; it is now the story itself which is inexplicable:
"Das 'Urteil' ist nicht zu erklären." 4

In November 1919 Kafka wrote to his father and said :
"Mein Schreiben handelte von Dir, ich klagte dort ja nur, was
ich an Deiner Brust nicht klagen konnte." 5 It is typical of him

1 J. p. 25. 2 T. pp. 293-4. 3 F. p. 394.
4 F. p. 396. 5 H. p. 203.
that he never delivered this letter. Typical, because all his writings are finite statements which come to no conclusion. Nature itself is a finite statement which comes to no conclusion; the present surface around us is exact but unfinished; it is in a state of transition, constantly consumed, like Prometheus' liver, and constantly resurrected in a form whose future is invisible in the present.

Myth too is a finite statement which comes to no conclusion. The myth is a legend, concrete in appearance, finite in statement, but with enduring implications for the human mind. Here the events may seem impossible, but they linger in the deepest recesses of consciousness, not pure fabrications but fabrications which are recognizably pure—clear statements, simple, with a simplicity beyond our formulation of truth, therefore inexplicable.

In the ancient myths these gods, messengers, impossible animals, impossible transformations (Daphne into laurel-tree, Arethusa into fountain of fresh water, and so on) are fantasy made precise, but a fantasy related to a conviction of truth. Is this a mirror of the world? It hardly seems a mirror of the world we know. If these are attempts to probe the mystery which is the relationship of the isolated individual to his environment, then the images must seem to the rational mind quite remote and unreal. But they are not so much attempts to "probe" the mystery, they are attempts to present it, to organize instinct into form, to explain by not explaining. And if we consider them in the light of later knowledge we may well feel that the impossible transformations are not so impossible after all. Science establishes connections in the physical world which we did not know before; it thus reduces the mystery, in certain areas. In terms of chemical constituents the human body and laurel-tree and fountain of fresh water are but variations on a theme, the theme of physical life, in which the human form, and every other form, is simply a particular organization of universal energy.

"Wirkliche Realität ist immer unrealistisch", says Kafka. Did I speak of impossible animals? Genetic engineering brings Frankenstein's monster nearer every day. Life catches up with the imagination. Knowledge pushes back that frontier which

1 J. p. 91.
separates us from the mystery, and it is significant that Kafka speaks of the writer's task as an assault on such a frontier, the area of transition which he calls "die fortwährend zitternde Grenze zwischen dem gewöhnlichen Leben und dem scheinbar wirklicheren Schrecken". In both science and art it is all a question of organization, of revealing and connecting the parts. This is what happens in natural growth too, that creation which was once naively regarded as the professional obligation of the gods. Transformation is the re-arrangement which is going on all the time. Form is organization.

In the myth the parts are presented without comment. The relationship between them is magical, beyond rational understanding. But this magic presumes a common relationship which cannot be understood; it is magic because it is inexplicable, but it stands on a foundation of truth. Through later scientific discovery and psychological speculation the apparently magical connection may be seen to be natural and existent. In the myth, it is as if the environment is foreshortened, time compressed, the transformations of nature instant. The trees of the primeval forest still stand, though they are consumed before our eyes as coal on the fire. What is the next shape of this carbon, the re-organization which is resurrection? Past and future exist only in the present, this bonfire of the past, from which the phoenix flies into the future. "Der Augenblick ist Ewigkeit", as Goethe tells us in his poem Vermächtnis. We watch with Cadmus as the crop of warriors spring fully-armed from the soil.

But what mysteries remain! It is only as we become more aware of the parts that we may see the common relationship of the whole. But we see only the parts; the total relationship is not given to us. We know more than we did; life does catch up with the imagination. But increased knowledge serves only to increase the human sense of mystery: any extension of the frontier of knowledge means a corresponding extension of the frontier of possibilities and of that terror which, to Kafka, would seem more real. Is it entirely by chance that our scientific age sees a revival of interest in the rituals and paraphernalia of magic? It is interesting to note that the dates of the historical Dr.

1 T. p. 577.
Johannes Faustus, who was suspected of trading with the devil because he "speculated the elements", correspond almost exactly to those of Copernicus, who, in the name of science, disturbed the static certainty of his world and left mankind face to face with a perpetually shifting frontier of infinite possibilities.

The environment is our only evidence, and we can see only as far as we can see. Kafka's torment and his hope spring from man's dual vision of his environment as either devilish or divine: devilish in the senseless fragmentation which is all he can see, but divine in man's inexplicably persistent conviction that there is a foundation of truth, a secret harmony of the parts, a magical connection he cannot see. The gods represent ultimate harmony, and through art man too aspires to this condition. Zeus is described as the father of gods and men; the gods are a subjective essence in man, his faith in harmony. This is why Kafka can describe his writing as a form of prayer.\(^1\) He is summoning his gods, reaching into that realm of impossibility with the absurd faith that it is in fact a realm of inevitability. "Das Schreiben ist eben eine Art von Geisterbeschwörung", he says to his friend Janouch.\(^2\) And in the diaries he makes the connection between magical conjuration and that naming of the right name which is the essence of his activity and aim as a writer: "Es ist sehr gut denkbar, daß die Herrlichkeit des Lebens um jeden und immer in ihrer ganzen Fülle bereitliegt, aber verhängt, in der Tiefe, unsichtbar, sehr weit. Aber sie liegt dort, nicht feindselig, nicht widerwillig, nicht taub. Ruft man sie mit dem richtigen Wort, beim richtigen Namen, dann kommt sie. Das ist das Wesen der Zauberei, die nicht schafft, sondern ruft."\(^3\)

Kafka's stories, like the ancient myths, are figured surfaces which represent innate beliefs, and these beliefs are derived from his reaction to the environment. To judge from the impression his work has made, we must assume that his stories appeal to a great many people as an accurate reflection of their personal predicament. But where, in these stories, is the hope? Where is life's splendour which art is supposed to summon up? Kafka's diaries are catalogues of woe, his novels handbooks of frustration. "Das Schreiben versagt sich mir", he cries.\(^4\) And, in another

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\(^1\) H. p. 348. \(^2\) J. p. 29. \(^3\) T. p. 544. \(^4\) H. p. 388.
place: “Was ich berühre, zerfällt.”

In his diary for 1922 he writes about the solitude he needs for his work: “Wohin führt sie? Sie kann, dies scheint am zwingendsten, zum Irrsinn führen, darüber kann nichts weiter ausgesagt werden, die Jagd geht durch mich und zerreiβt mich.”

How often was he driven to the very brink? “Mein Leben habe ich damit verbracht, mich gegen die Lust zu wehren, es zu beenden.”

Prometheus is chained to the rock as punishment for stealing the divine fire. He has brought to man knowledge of the divine, but not divinity itself. The gods are remote. Kafka’s despair is the naked cry of Prometheus as the eagles tear at his vitals, the vitals which never cease to grow. It is deceptively easy to classify Kafka as a negative, pessimistic writer. This is a misconception. We do have the catalogues of woe, the handbooks of frustration, but these are the only premise if we are to make sense of our perplexing experience. This is the evidence, the only evidence we have, and the writer starts from here. “Symptome nimm hin”, says Kafka in his diaries, “klage nicht über Symptome, steige in das Leiden hinab”.

This attitude, this faith that revelation must and can come only from immediate suffering, the assault of experience, underlies many entries in his diaries, entries which may seem puzzling if we do not accept the images as form given to innate beliefs. “Das Pferd des Angreifers zum eigenen Ritt benützen. Einzige Möglichkeit. Aber was für Kräfe und Geschicklichkeiten verlangt das! Und wie spät ist es schon!” And, perhaps the most pathetic and inspiring: “Irgendwo wartet die Hilfe und die Treiber lenken mich hin.” The beaters, of course, are his experience of life, life which must be endured in every trifling detail, for there is no detail which is trifling.

Kafka’s fictional works, like the ancient myths, do not explain or analyse. As in those legends, the attitude is one of total acceptance. There is no complexity of surface to puzzle us; we are puzzled by its simplicity. This prose is a membrane which breathes. Here feeling is form, and form is feeling, indistinguishable. And the simplicity of this prose is connected

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(all is connected) to the fundamental attitude of acceptance. His heroes live in an environment which is legendary, because here the magical connection is always taken for granted. The greatest obstacle to any appreciation of Kafka is the state of mind which insists on reducing experience to rational concepts and which says that anything which cannot be connected to the normal process of human thought must be discarded as absurd. The foundation of Kafka's work is the belief that no part of our experience can be discounted or discarded. All parts contribute to truth, so how can any part be described as absurd? If there is a contradiction between observed events and human thought, then it is human thought which must be re-examined and recast.

Kafka's images are of a world as it has not yet been discovered. Here the understanding is stretched beyond rational comprehension, beyond the limits of perceptible experience. Nobody has been here before. We are in the realms where imagination is waiting for life to catch up with it. It is a world where things just happen and are not committed in advance to rational comprehension. This makes the difficulty. How do we comprehend what is deliberately beyond our comprehension? We too are placed in a position of absurdity—if we like to define it so. The reader too needs a sense of wonder, a sense of truth in the inexplicable rock.

When, in Kafka's story *Die Verwandlung*, Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning to find he has been transformed into a gigantic insect, he immediately accepts the "absurd" situation, and the story follows from here. He is surprised, disturbed, and so are his family, but no more than if he had woken with a crippling attack of migraine. The irrational is placed in the rational world as an integral part of it. It belongs, and must be accepted.

The inevitability of the unexpected is already present in Kafka's first attempt at a novel, *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande*, written in 1907. This is a fragment, two attempts at a beginning. Eduard Raban sets out from the city for a fortnight's holiday in the country, where he is to join his fiancée. Committed to marriage, he finds the simple journey a bewilderment of obstacles. "Böse ist das, was ablenkt", says Kafka else-
The great distraction is, of course, marriage; and here Kafka anticipates his own later reluctance when he is crushed between his natural desire for marriage and the fear that marriage will rob him of his spiritual isolation, the source of vision. It is characteristic that Eduard Raban’s secret reluctance is not described. Feeling becomes form, metamorphosed into a series of external and apparently unrelated hindrances: rain, carriages that sweep across his path on the way to the station, a friend who accosts him in the street and talks and talks and talks, rooting him to the spot when he knows he should be hurrying on his way. He will miss the train. But no, it is still there when he reaches the station. A last wild rush through dimly-lighted passages. “Dann sah der Beamte heraus, sagte, es sei doch höchste Zeit, nahm die Banknote und warf laut die verlangte Karte und kleines Geld auf das Brett.” It is as if Raban is expected, the unknown inevitable. But this is a moment in his mind, it all emanates from his mind. It is like a dream—the obstacles, the booking-clerk—the mind floats free from the limitations of reason but constructs its images out of experienced forms. When a friend referred to *Die Verwandlung* as “ein schrecklicher Traum, eine schreckliche Vorstellung” Kafka remarked: “Der Traum enthüllt die Wirklichkeit, hinter der die Vorstellung zurückbleibt.” The indescribable, the unspeakable, everything that man refuses to acknowledge in his conscious mind may find revenge in the dream, masked in irrational construction.

In clause after clause Kafka hitches out the interminable complications of distracting possibilities as they take shape in the mind. To the reader these are tangible images, a legendary surface which reveals in all the novels Kafka’s obsession with what he describes in his notebooks as “die Mannigfaltigkeiten, die sich mannigfaltig drehen in den Mannigfaltigkeiten des einen Augenblicks, in dem wir leben”. The one moment in which we live. And he goes on here: “Und noch immer ist der Augenblick nicht zu Ende, sieh nur!” The present moment, which is past and present and future, open, the home of all possibilities. The complications of the immediate moment

1 H. p. 84.  2 H. p. 21.  3 J. p. 27.  4 H. p. 273.
become, in the novels and stories, a particular perception of outer phenomena as obstacles. As long as the phenomena in the environment are perceived only in isolation from each other, without apparent connection, they seem contradictory and accidental, obstacles to understanding. But the "obstacles" themselves are the component parts of understanding. These heroes are human, and if they speak to us of the human condition in a way we can recognize, it is because we too know their frustration in a world of loose ends.

Every action of the Kafka hero seems to radiate its own perplexing possibilities. He moves to circumvent the obstacle and immediately creates a multitude of fresh obstacles. In that early fragment, *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen*, we ultimately come to a point where the obstacles are explicitly attributed to the actions of the central character Raban. After a train journey with peasants and commercial travellers Raban finds himself the only passenger in a horse-drawn omnibus, jolting along in the dark. He is disheartened by the infinite possibilities that seem to spring from his actions. This is another moment that seems to have no end. He plagues himself with interminable speculations:


The Kafka heroes seem to affect their environment like electric eels, which carry their own magnetic field around with them. They influence and are influenced by "die Mannigfaltigkeiten, die sich mannigfaltig drehen in den Mannigfaltigkeiten des einen Augenblicks, in dem wir leben". They are completely in the eternal present, the moment which contains everything.

What complications arise from that moment described in the opening sentence of *Der Prozeß*, when Josef K. wakes up to find he is being arrested for some crime of whose very existence he is not aware! Is he waking into a nightmare, as Gregor Samsa wakes into

¹ H. p. 30.
the nightmare of his changed physical self in *Die Verwandlung*? The work of art is a definite image of indefinite feeling, so there too there is correspondence, physical to spiritual. These characters are indeed waking into a representation of their inner world, that dark dream-state, the home of fear and guilt where man is perpetually on trial before his conscience. This is "der Prozeß" of the title. In one of the *Betrachtungen* Kafka remarks: "Nur unser Zeitbegriff läßt uns das Jüngste Gericht so nennen, eigentlich ist es ein Standrecht." ¹ This is an unending process, the court in standing session. Can there be a feeling of guilt without crime? Josef K. is accused of the crime of being human. In the cathedral he says to the priest: "Ich bin aber nicht schuldig, es ist ein Irrtum. Wie kann denn ein Mensch überhaupt schuldig sein. Wir sind hier doch alle Menschen, einer wie der andere." To which the priest replies: "Das ist richtig, aber so pflegen die Schuldigen zu reden". ²

When Josef K. struggles to defend himself against the forces represented by the invisible courts of law he is struggling to understand his environment and struggling to understand his own struggles which are his appreciation of the environment. The hero faces a puzzling, hostile, attractive, necessary environment which is the authority he both fears and seeks. It is significant that the fearful court which shall decide his case seems to be everywhere, in all the attics of the town; and everyone he meets seems to have some connection with the court.

When Kafka wrote to his father and said "mein Schreiben handelte von Dir" he was acknowledging that his work was an effort to come to terms with authority. But it becomes more than the story of one child's sense of guilt which is immeasurably increased by this father's inexplicable air of certainty. It comes to stand for a wider relationship, both in subject and object: the relationship of individual man to an expectant and hostile and irresistible environment. The one moment in which Kafka's heroes live is the one moment in which all men live, the moment which is a confusion of choice, a paralysing freedom of action. Kafka takes the situation to its extreme, since he is a man of abnormal sensitivity. He thinks he is alone, unique in his

¹ H. p. 43. ² P. p. 253.
suffering, but the world has acknowledged that he is not. The individual expression takes on a legendary aspect.

In Kafka’s last novel Das Schloß we meet again the proliferation of obstacles and the interminable conversations which prove that although black is certainly black there is a sense in which it may be white, or red or perhaps blue; that when we advance we of course go forward but, seen from another angle, are really going backwards or to the side or... The perpetual possibilities hook on to each other until the mind reels. But the apparent contradictions are in fact the varying possibilities inherent in natural energy at every stage. Colour, for example, depends on the wave length of the light that is reflected, as we see when the spectrum emerges from a prism. Black is white when the object reflects all wave lengths instead of absorbing them. Kafka’s world is on the wrong side of the prism, where the colours, the dispositions of light, are visibly different from each other and apparently irreconcilable. His whole technique of resolution through interminable contradiction is a means of tacitly acknowledging that there is connection where it cannot be seen. Rationally, his heroes are aware of the conflicting colours; irrationally, they sense the single source on the other side of the prism. It is this irrational conviction which drives them on.

Das Schloß is more clearly the story of a quest than any other of the stories. K., the land surveyor, pursues his odyssey, drawn on by the remote castle on the hill, making for it, always on the point of achieving something, but never quite getting there. Here again, all the people of the village seem to have some connection with the castle. Only K. is excluded. From the start he experiences their hostility. They are the phenomena which are secretly joined in the realm of mystery, the phenomena which must be experienced. So K. accepts their hostility, as he accepts everything.

In this novel the hero seems to be wading through porridge. It is like a dream: everybody else can skim swiftly over the surface, it is only K. who flounders. The spiritual is physical again. “Es gibt nur ein Ziel, keinen Weg”, says Kafka in one of his notes. “Was wir Weg nennen, ist Zögern.”¹ The hesitation

¹ H. p. 303.
before choice, man's uncertainty before the multiplicity of phenomena in every living moment—this is what is transformed in this novel into a helpless human being who sinks at every step into deep snow which is however an assured crust for the feet of everyone else. It hinders him, it helps them. The world is an obstacle, but the obstacle is a human illusion.

Standing in the snow, K. sees the twins Artur and Jeremias glide past him at speed. He learns their names, he knows they are from the castle, he now sees them for the first time, he hears they have business at the inn; he cries out to them that he has business there too. But they do not stop. What happens now is an example of the attitude of total acceptance which, because it is an attitude normally impossible to man contemplating his environment, is presented in the novel as an incident which is rationally incomprehensible.

K. goes to the inn. Artur and Jeremias are waiting for him. "Wer seid ihr?" says K. They tell him they are his assistants. K. is expecting his old assistants, but these are strangers, they come from the castle. He knows this, and we know that he knows it. So, in a rational human context, we should expect him to laugh or ignore them or kick them out. He does none of these things. "Wie?" he says. "Ihr seid meine alten Gehilfen, die ich nachkommen ließ, die ich erwartete?" They reply that this is so. "Das ist gut," says K. after a short pause, "es ist gut, daß ihr gekommen seid." ¹ The short pause seems to betray Kafka's awareness of human imperfection. In the suprahuman realm there are no accidents, nothing is to be denied, for there are no contradictions. Speaking to his friend Janouch Kafka said: "Zufall nennt man das Zusammentreffen von Ereignissen, deren Ursachlichkeit man nicht kennt. Ohne Ursache gibt es aber keine Welt. Darum gibt es Zufälle eigentlich nicht in der Welt, sondern nur hier...." (At this point Kafka touched his forehead.) "Zufälle gibt es nur in unserem Kopf, in unseren beschränkten Wahrnehmungen. Sie sind die Spiegelung der Grenzen unserer Erkenntnis." ²

It is extraordinary how Kafka the novelist controls and

¹ S. p. 29.
² J. pp. 51-52.
organizes this view of the situation in which he himself is desper­ately involved. It is a situation in which, physically and in finite image, uncertainty and confident trust are inextricably joined. What sense can we make of confident uncertainty? Though Kafka’s work may seem nonsensical by rational standards, this is his way of saying that reason is not enough. Reason is based on perceptions which cover only part of reality, not the whole. This is why he says that true reality is always unrealistic, and that the dream reveals the reality which conception lags behind. Beyond the limits of conscious perception and rational analysis lies experience of the whole. This is irresistibly attractive, fearful because unknown—the castle itself, which seems to batter at the hero’s limited senses, giving out over the telephone a single high but resonant sound, “die an das Ohr schlug, so, wie wenn sie fordere, tiefer einzudringen, als nur in das armselige Gehör”. The human sense of hearing is, like every other human sense, miserable, inadequate.

Everything that happens or can happen to K. seems perplexing and inevitable at the same time, because he exists in two worlds at once: the world of human imperfection and the world where man’s fragmentary awareness becomes complete, where all is one, negative merely the other side of positive, nothing is accidental and all contradictions are resolved. Each facet of this unity is important as an integral part of the whole, so everything must be accepted and treated with gravity. The most trifling thing is inevitable, and endurance is everything, endurance being acceptance, Sebastian accepting the arrows.

The delineation of the Kafka hero in his fictional context hinges on the concept of time. In William Faulkner the tortuous parentheses in his sentences are attempts to establish the past as permeating the present. He too presents an apparently inexplicable present—statements, people, snatches of dialogue which seem unrelated at first sight. He then proceeds to relate them by recalling and revealing their roots in the past. In Kafka the “contradictory” combination of impossible and inevitable (as in K.’s acceptance of his assistants) is the author’s declaration that there is only this one moment in which we live,

1 S. p. 32.
and that therefore truth is here and now, or nowhere. The human sense of fragmented experience and human knowledge of the divine are presented in his fiction both as parallel actions and as integrated action. So we have the two as one, and the one seen as two. It is like that curiosity of topology, the Möbius band, which is a strip of paper (or any material) given a half-twist and having its ends glued together to form a circle. You can run a pencil down the centre of the strip until you meet the point where you started; you will find you have traced a line on both sides without lifting the pencil from the paper. Does this mean the paper has only one side?

"Von einem gewissen Punkt an gibt es keine Rückkehr mehr," says Kafka in the Betrachtungen. "Dieser Punkt ist zu erreichen." But how is this point to be reached? Through patience, he believes, through patience which is allied to that acceptance so characteristic of his work. It is because of impatience, he tells us, that man was expelled from Paradise; it is because of impatience he does not return there. Kafka believes in Paradise, and so do his heroes, without knowing it. "Wir wurden geschaffen, um im Paradies zu leben," he says in the Betrachtungen, "das Paradies war bestimmt, uns zu dienen. Unsere Bestimmung ist geändert worden; daß dies auch mit der Bestimmung des Paradieses geschehen wäre, wird nicht gesagt." Evil he defines as "eine Ausstrahlung des menschlichen Bewußtseins in bestimmten Übergangsstellungen". That is, it emanates from man; it is fragmentary perception. For he goes on: "Nicht eigentlich die sinnliche Welt ist Schein, sondern ihr Böses, das allerdings für unsere Augen die sinnliche Welt bildet."  

The sensual world, then, is infinitely more than we can make of it, consciously. The eyes of the Kafka hero are wide open; he sees evil, obstacles, distractions. The true vision is shrouded in darkness, and in the novels it is soon apparent that approximation to truth becomes an approximation to physical darkness. For these heroes the shades of night are always falling fast, no matter what time of day it is. Their conscious perception is

1 H. p. 39.  
2 H. p. 39.  
3 H. pp. 48-49.  
4 H. p. 49.
light, their unconscious dark. In *Der Prozeß* we find K., immersed in his case, distracted by events at the office. These distractions have K. as their centre: "Das alles bewegte sich um K. als um seinen Mittelpunkt."¹ In other words, they radiate from him. When he goes to the cathedral distractions cease. Now, at ten o'clock in the morning, the place grows as dark as night, so that K. has to grope around by the light of an electric torch. He is nearer perception at this moment than at any other.

In *Das Schloß* twilit corners abound, and eventually the hero seems to attain, if only for a few moments, the condition of illumination which is complete submersion in the dark unconscious. No longer external darkness as image, but inner darkness and silence as truth. After long striving, K. at last gains the privilege of an interview with a castle official who is spending the night in the village. The official reveals that K. can win his case; he tells him "wie die Partei zwar in diese Gelegenheit in aller Hilflosigkeit (…) hineingetappt ist, wie sie aber jetzt, wenn sie will, Herr Landvermesser, alles beherrschen kann…."² But K. hears nothing. He falls asleep. He knows, as all humans know, about the threshold of truth; but he cannot consciously know truth itself. "Wahrheit ist unteilbar," runs another of Kafka's *Betrachtungen*, "kann sich also selbst nicht erkennen; wer sie erkennen will, muß Lüge sein."³ It is because K. is unconscious, given over to nature in his physical exhaustion, that his triumph is possible. He no longer differentiates, he is no longer opposite. He has indeed stumbled into this opportunity "in aller Hilflosigkeit". He is not aware of success, but unawareness is a prerequisite of revelation. When K. wakes up he is still fallibly human, but Kafka has symbolized the way to salvation without violating the truth that it can never be apparent to K.'s imperfect human consciousness.

"Meine Geschichten," said Kafka to Janouch, "sind eine Art von Augenschließen."⁴ In *Das Schloß* K. sees only when his eyes are closed in sleep. He has returned to Paradise, the state of harmony, the moment before they ate of the apple and

"the eyes of them both were opened and they knew that they were naked". In one of his letters to Milena Jesenská Kafka writes: "Manchmal glaube ich, ich verstehe den Sündenfall wie kein Mensch sonst."¹ But can we speak of the moment before they ate of the apple? If we do, we speak in terms of the human concept of time, as we speak in terms of the human concept of space if we put the Garden in some remote and inaccessible region. Kafka, coming back again and again in his notebooks to the expulsion from Eden, relates it to the eternal moment, the one moment in which we live. He sees the Fall as here, now, in our misinterpretation of the environment. But so is Paradise. The point of no return is here. The Kafka hero, in his perplexing duality, is the fictional projection of this writer's belief that man bears within himself, in this one moment which is eternity (and can indeed possess nowhere else) both separation and harmony, both uncertainty and confidence, both guilt and innocence, both flaming sword and friendly Cherubim. ("Ich bin aber nicht schuldig."—"So pflegen die Schuldigen zu reden.")

It all depends on man's interpretation of the environment, that authority which can be, in his eyes, either hostile or friendly. Hell is an alibi for the human condition, an attributed home for torments and devils, a home which satisfies our concept of time and space but not our deeper understanding. It conveniently puts the blame on somebody else. For some reason (or perhaps for the sake of reason) myths are concretely placed in time and space, gods and devils differentiated in form and visibly remote from man. But these are man's torments, man's joy. We might adapt Kafka's phrase about the Last Judgement and say it is only our concept of time which makes us regard the Fall of Man as the first judgement, an event in the remote past and a remote place; it is in fact a constant process, here and now, another court in standing session, the court which Josef K. faces when he gets up that morning, the situation which every man faces every day in the perplexing environment, where he feels guilty without being aware he has done anything wrong. The eagles are eternally hacking at Prometheus on the inexplicable rock.

¹ M. p. 199.
For the Kafka hero the castle on the hill remains a distant dream, the butcher's knife has reached his heart, and his sense of guilt is so great that he knows the shame of it must outlive him. But with it all is inexplicable glory, and hope, the mild acceptance of the gods. Doubt and knowledge of the divine co-exist here, not side by side, but as two faces which blend into the single mask, the transparent surface of Kafka's fiction.