

## The Sexual Strategy of the son in Kafka (2001)



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### **THE SEXUAL STRATEGY OF THE SON IN KAFKA: TERRORISM AND EXILE (2001)**

Identities, Euro-Balkan, Skopje, br. 1, tom. 1, 2001, 67-82.

#### **Infantilism**

- We are all neotenic-

Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*

In this essay, I will not delve broadly and exclusively in the issue of the sexuality of the Son in Kafka, but particularly in one of its aspects - sexual strategy. I would like to present and elaborate two complementary structures, for I consider two Kafka's posthumously published short stories commonly entitled Sons, The Metamorphosis and The Judgment, a joint representation of the two archaic resolutions of the Son's sexual drives. The first structure is when a Son becomes a terrorist of the Symbolic Order/Father, for the terrorism - begotten by the sadism of the Symbolic Order - can be seen as a quasi-form of sadism. The opposite structure obtained by the Son's need to marry

the Symbolical Order, i.e. the Father, arrives from the masochistic pleasure to devastate the Symbolic Order by swallowing it. The last structure includes the secondary production of the Other which unfolds in the Son, since the exile, as we will try to explain later, can be analyzed as utopian version of terrorism. The resolutions involved - murder in the first story, and suicide in the latest - are dependent, both, on the utopian/non-utopian character of the chosen sexual strategies, and on the male or female nature of the Son's sexuality within the Symbolic Order.

A joint complementary picture of the relations between the Son and the Father/Symbolical Order in the Kafka's two short stories, can be visualized as following:

Hatred Love

Terrorism Exile

Murder Suicide

As Shakespeare points out, with the greatest insight, in the relation to the Other, hatred is more archaic and primordial than love. My only love sprung from my only hate! - says Juliet immediately after meeting Romeo. Therefore, just as the hatred, the Son's love towards the Father, in Kafka, is also directed toward devastating the Symbolic Order. The issue most attractive to me is the significance of the two strategic solutions chosen: the terrorism and the exile. But, before I venture into their analysis, I would like to distance myself from the issue whether the Symbolical Order can be so easily equalized to the Father. This is not only because of the limited scope of this essay, but primarily due to the position of the Son in Kafka. The Son is not always in a love-hate relationship with the Father, but with the Symbolic Order, whom he sees represented in the Father. Therefore, I shall divert the main attention to the more essential question: what is the relation between the Subject (here, the Son as a Subject) and the Symbolical Order? How does the Son, as the bearer of sexuality, position himself in relation to the Order? I would like to quote a sentence from the book *Tales of Love* by Julia Kristeva, where she says:

“We are all perverts, we are neotenic, incapable of subsisting solely within the symbolic order, constantly driven to seek the animal sources of a passion that defies the Name to the advantage of loss of self in the flood of pleasure.”

Kristeva positions the subject as the one who always seeks crisis. Precisely, every subject is defined as close to madness, always perverted and criminal regarding the Symbolic Order. That is because the Symbolical Order in which we sojourn is ambivalent, and its contradiction affects us so that we never fully abide by its rules and we always seek for a word that will oblige us to nothing. However, there is no such word and the Language becomes a place where everyone begins

a battle. Kristeva says, the Subject confronts the Language. With all my passion, I want to defeat the Name, lose the Language, so that I can fully enjoy the pleasure. For the Language, as well as the Symbolical Order, is made of ambiguity. Therefore, the criminal, pervert subject can be defined as an eternally infantile subject. The key word in Kristeva's quote is neotenic. Neoteny is a quality or ability of the adult to retain the memory of its immature, juvenile characteristics. Therefore, the adult has a built-in capacity of being a non-adult, and can use this potential as needs arise - and there are always needs. The most significant post-Freudian psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, describes this extensively in his lecture on "The Symbolical Order." I shall present here one of his examples of neoteny. It is a famous case of a charming patient of Dr. Balian, who belonged to the talk-talk-talk-to-say-nothing type of a person. On one of the séances, after an entire hour of "sick babble," Balian gently touched the spot that didn't want to be released. She received a recommendation letter, in which was stated that she is "a trustworthy person." The breaking point was that she did not want to be seen as trustworthy. For word is bond, and she will be obliged to stop talking and start working. For work has its laws, restrictions, and working hours. Work brings respect for the Symbolical Order and that is why, Lacan says, she veers towards child-speak. She had intuitively understood that the child has a way of talking that, even while prophetic and full of celestial wisdom, even when discovering the great truths of the universe, obliges the child to nothing.

Neoteny necessary reminds us of the capital investment Freud made in the realm of sexual theory. By investment in the awakening of the neglected infantilism and infantile amnesia, Freud's theory re-evaluates the infantile subject and its sexuality capacity, and one of his key works is titled exactly "Infantile Sexuality." This amnesia is created where the sexual drives have been caste away. This means that the very culture seeks neoteny, for the subject to be included in the Symbolical Order. Thought conservative in its descriptive capacity, Freud's cultural theory has proven to be prescriptive, as well. I think that exactly the renewal of the amnesic sexual drive, brought forth the restructuring of the Modernity. Here I would like to introduce my definition of the Modernity as a project led by the Son. As several mystical and unorthodox traditions stated, the Modern period, or new era, is dominated by the Son. I would claim that the cultural sympathy, energy and concentration on the Son in the 20th century, is due to his released, amnestied neoteny.

While I was writing this essay, I read a column in a Macedonian daily, where the author was stating that: "a juvenile is an entire nation" (there: the Macedonian nation) and that "our adolescence have its advantages."

## Terrorism

- The solutions of the spirit are nothing but requests,  
different precisely because of the different composition of the bodies. -

Spioza, Ethics

The advantage here is, in fact, the advantage of the terrorist. Regarding the aforementioned column, it is appealing how in the diplomatic rhetoric, a terrorist from a foreign place is often referred to as a rebel. This shift, for example, is often present in journalistic reports on the terrorist crisis in Macedonia and Southeast Europe. It is my opinion that the cultural sympathy towards the Son has somehow influenced the rotation of these two phenomena. Infancy calls out for a need to defeat the Name, or at least, restructure it. In this process of Naming, we are witnessing the diplomatisation of the cultural sympathy towards the Son, organized on the imaginary enchantment in the idealized gaze (albeit, an effect of the essentially, naïve gaze) of oneself as the Son in the foreign Symbolical Order. The subject here is the Western European or the American, who gazes at oneself as the Son of the Southern European Symbolical Order.

The same mechanism, however, is on work, when the reader identifies with the Kafka's hero, Gregor Samsa, in *The Metamorphosis* (1912, first published in 1915). The story of a Son, who becomes a terrorist, will kick off our first theoretic category, which I will refer to as animalism. The main character in this story, Gregor Samsa, works hard as a traveling salesman, in order to financially support his parents and his younger sister. One morning, he wakes up in his bed transformed into a giant vermin. At first, practical issues worry him: how to get up from the bed and walk with his many legs. Soon enough, his abilities, tastes and interests change - he climbs the walls and eats from the floor. Nobody can understand his new language, the language of a bug. Terrified by this metamorphosis, his family locks him up in his room and refuses communication with him. When Gregor, on one occasion, tries to leave the room, his father starts to throw apples at him trying to scare him off. One of the apples is stuck in his back and causes an infection. Gregor grows weaker and weaker and soon he dies. The cleaning maid collects his remnants and throws them in the trashcan.

There are many texts in the literary criticism, which, although not showing bad will towards the body, have little understanding for its secrets. They see the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa from human to bug through the economy and logic of the gaze. These texts say that a gaze at Samsa

recognizes a bug in the, heretofore, traveling salesman, son and brother. The gaze of the never innocent beholder (the family gaze: the father, the mother and the sister; and the non-family: the tenants, a procurer and the maid) wants to see a bug in Samsa. Gregor has not become a bug, but, rather, like a bug to them. This reasoning is fundamentally wrong, not only because its logic stems from the moralism of the Modern (which refuses to bereave itself from the luxury of the human non-reducibility to the animal), but, above all, because Kafka elegantly evades the problem of the spectator and the laws of spectatorship. The first eyes to recognize the bug in the, until then, traveling salesman Gregor Samsa are the very eyes of Samsa. Here is how Gregor faces his new nature at the beginning of the story:

“He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his domelike brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly stay in place and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes.”

This is different from the economy of gaze, a key factor to understanding Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” monster, which faces his identity not in the laboratory but after his first encounter with people. Taking on the gaze of the other, he becomes cognizant of his monstrous identity, monstrous because different, regarding theirs. Following this logic, every gaze is the product of the society, and visibility is a category of the cognitive - we see what we think. Samsa’s problem is obviously not in the gaze of the Other, but is a true determination of the body, which has taken on the line of the animalistic. The entire story bears witness to his human understanding with the animalistic. While the weak will of the spirit tries to forget, his body informs itself of the existence, tolerance and maneuvering of the other body - the animal, which begins to live within him. The other body inscribes in his. His body faster than his spirit frees itself from the naïve belief that it is one, sole and human body.

Here we need to recall and think of the capital investment that Deleuze and Guattari made in the realm of the mechanisms of the body’s animalization. They showed that the bodies, just like the ideas, do not die, but turn into archaisms. In the book “A Thousand Plateaus,” Deleuze and Guattari analyze animalism and the new philosophical formula born out of it - becoming an animal. One can immediately perceive the exclusion of the word “like”. It is an act of the elimination of the mediator, or, an act of the evasion of the metaphor. The cultural duress pursues mankind into seeing relations in the correspondence of the elements in nature: A is to B like C is to D. The effect from the operation of metaphor leads to an essential misunderstanding of the laws of nature and the secrets of the body, says Deleuze and Guattari. This release from the mimesis is, in fact, an act of confrontation with the Language. The symbolical epithet is lost in order to leave the body just enjoy being, becoming one with nature. The present thought produces privileges to a culture permeated with rationalization and non-affection. A man cannot say: “I am a bull, I am a wolf,” because then he greets the animalistic within. The Modern forces the man to say: “I am to the

woman what the bull is to the cow, or I am to another man what the wolf is to the ewe.” (Deleuze/Guattari, 1992: 237) Becoming an animal is a task of being a neighbor, of being adjacent to the animalistic, as a real production. Deleuze and Guattari’s suspicion - they say we know very little of the inseparability of the human and the animalistic - is justified. I would like to remind of a recent discovery of two twin girls, aged 10, in a forest in Africa. At the time when they were found, living with a flock of sheep, although two, they had not developed any language, any system of signs and symbols. This shows that the body feels neighborliness with other bodies and has the ability of self-production. The cognizance of the body depends on this production and it will oftentimes work on directives given out by the body itself. The body, by the very laws of its nature, is capable of many feats - and even the spirit finds it magnificent. Samsa does such rehabilitation of the animalistic, which is, in fact, an archaic memory of the body. It is an inhuman agreement to the animalistic. It’s principle of approaching, without any analogy, to the neighborliness of animalism. The principle question is: why does Samsa’s body decide to coexist with the animal?

To answer this question, we have to glance at yet another, hidden metamorphosis in the story - the one of the Father. Since Gregor takes on the financial care for the family, the Father declines and retreats; after Gregor turns into a bug, the Father activates again, working and “holding himself very erect.” It is the Father-Son rotation around the capitalist idea: never be idle. More precisely, in this pair, one is always prostituting the idea of work in the Symbolic Order, and the other is gaining erected energy to fight its prostitution. This libidinal charge and discharge is helping to establish the identities in the body of the Patriarchy. In terrorism, as well as in sadism, the themes of the Father and the patriarch dominate. However, the subjects of terrorism and sadism are different. Deleuze writes that the sadistic theme resides, after all, on the theme of the Father who destroys his family. In sadism, the picture of the woman is created that she explodes, since the sadistic Father is the one who disbands the family and prostitutes its members: in an indicative scene in the story, Samsa’s sister plays the piano for the tenants, who are figuratively, a deaf audience, since blind for any aestheticism. Playing the piano, is an order of the Father, by which he prostitutes his daughter, while the tenants are the symptom of the disbanding of the family.

This is where the terrorism positions itself close to sadism. I think that terrorism, which resides on the theme of the Son and his restlessness regarding the system, has very similar effects on the body of the Patriarchy. The Son’s terroristic strategy, which can be referred as bodily terrorism, the terrorism of the body, effects what is crucial for the Patriarchy - and by no means, that is the Body itself. In the explosion, which comes after the metamorphosis, by living close to the animalistic, the Son renders any further procreation - impossible! And verily, this is terrorism’s final goal: making procreation impossible and, in effect, actively nullifying the Mother. The main paradox leading into terrorism can be brought down to the what Lacan called lady’s refusal, in fact, an infantile denial to be tied up to a contract. Or, as Kristeva says, the neotenic capacity of the Subject to be confronted with the Name. In the hazy mixture of joy and humiliation - he who gives the orders to the body simultaneously, together with the witnesses, shows deep solidarity - Samsa, in fact, renders the idea of existence outside the Symbolical Order possible. The punishment for this

im/possible existence, is a murder, and the Father is the prosecutor, so that he can then rehabilitate the family structure and restores the Order. This is a vengeful murder but also an identity murder - only by killing the Father, one becomes a Father (again). On the territory of your destructed body, I become an entity, only and complete.

## Exile

- Strangely, the foreigner lives  
within us: he is the hidden face of our identity...-

Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*

The equal outcome- becoming one where there were many - arises when the Son wants to marry instead of to terrorize the Order. In *The Judgment* Kafka presents an ultimate pattern of a homosexual and/or incestuous love. The Son desires to overcome the ambivalence of the Symbolic Order/Father by swallowing it, and his intention is to restore the lost, initial harmony. He hallucinates of merging with the Whole. The object of love in this story is supposed to disappear as well, but not by destruction (with murder, as a punishment that follows), but by swallowing (with suicide, as a punishment that follows). The main character in *The Judgment* is the Son, Georg Bendemann. He is at his professional and private peak. After his mother's death, his father physically deteriorates. The son takes over his father's business, incorporates some innovations and after becoming rich, he affiances himself to a rich heiress. He is still hesitant about the future marriage, since he feels uneasiness to notify his most intimate friend from the youth about his future plan. Bendemann's father, already on the deathbed, resists both, the fiancé - declaring her the reason for desecrating the memory of the mother, and the friend - declaring him a lie! He sentences the son to death and Bendemann leaves the house and commits a suicide. The most dramatic and most mystic figure in the story, the friend from the youth, is a total opposite from Bendemann. After making nothing of his work, he immigrated to St. Petersburg and started a business there, failing again. He did not succeed in contacting the colony of his kinsmen there, and lost all connections to his country. Embittered by the world and the people, he rejects all objects and gifts, falls ill, and becomes a refugee, more precisely a foreigner.

At this point a rapid reminder of the production of the Other in me, comes at stake. Father dubs the friend from St. Petersburg a Lie: "You have no friend in St. Petersburg. You've always been one for pulling people's legs and you haven't hesitated even when it comes to me." If the friend is a fake, then he does not live in St. Petersburg, but in the Son. That means the Son, who lives successfully in the Symbolical Order, has a need to create a qualitatively opposed Alter Ego, which exists completely unsuccessfully in the same Symbolic Order, in the same time. A question is posed: Why does Bendemann feel the need to create a Fake I? Here we will recall the extraordinary discernment of the nature of self-cognizance in Slavoj Žižek's *Metastases of Enjoyment* (1994). In the prologue of the book, Žižek tells the episode of Freud's visit to Shkofyan Cavern in Slovenia. In his writings, Freud notes that while sigh seeing the fascinating world of underground caves, to his surprise, he suddenly met another visitor. This scene later helped him create the well-known



metaphor of descending into the nether world of the subconscious. Freud met Vienna's mayor at that time, Dr Karl Lügger, a right wing, radical anti-Semite. The word-play with Mr. Lügger's surname, the German for lie (die Lüge - a lie), brought him to the essential truth of his learning: when going deep into our personality, the thing we will discover there is - the Lie. This basic and primordial lie is a creation of the Subject, which creates phantasmagoric constructions with the aid of which it tries to cover up the ambivalence of the Symbolical Order in which we dwell. The embodied and visible Bendemann is successful by all norms of the Order, but he simultaneously fosters a hidden, fake Bendemann, who will testify of the essential failure of every Subject in the Order. There is a consciousness that resides inside Bendemann, one that says there is no such thing as the inherent ownership of the subject. His double says there is no territory that belongs to me. Every success is the mythology of the stolen; what the subject owns is the lie. What really exists in the Symbolical Order is not an I, but a foreign I. In her book *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva makes a key investment in the theory of the stranger, which is, by definition, always my hidden face, the other side of my own identity. That means that, I am a refugee to myself, I am always on a distance, since this distance is my shield. Since distance is for Bendemann, what animalism is for Samsa, the later stays, and turns into a terrorist, for the animalism will enable him to exist outside the Order, while the prior leaves, and creates a distance, from which he can both search for what is lost, and work on what is wished. And what is always permanently lost, what produces oneself as a foreigner, fanatic of the lost, is a state of not having a mother, says Kristeva. Just like in Camus' *Stranger*, where the alienation comes after the death of the mother - Bendemann is shaped into a foreigner when he loses his mother. That loss pulls a desire in him - not for simple possession of objects - but for the most fundamental wish that is the base of our entire existence, all the language and knowledge - the wish for return to the primary unity. As her theme, Kristeva takes up the Other, disgraceful "I" and realizes him through the poetic picture of a child who has rejected all wishes for objects and has swallowed up his parents all too soon. The friend from St. Petersburg in Kafka is also defined as an "old-child". In the newly constituted territory, Bendemann situates his phobic I, his Friend, who reject the Symbolic Order by rejecting the marriage itself.

I shall allow myself a game and turn this thesis around. If the Father is lying, then the Friend from Russia is a real one. This twisted thesis, as we shall see, not only brings us to the same results, but also helps answer the question: why does Bendemann commit a suicide? After Bendemann admits that: "I can't cut myself to another pattern that might make a more suitable friend for him", his fiancée, Frieda, shows a fundamental resistance towards the friend from Russia. She feels that the absent foreigner is the most fundamental love of Bendemann, and that forces her to say: "If you have friends like that, Georg, you shouldn't ever have gotten engaged at all." In the Fatherly and patriarchal theme of *The Judgment*, the female figure of the absent fiancée, explodes more strongly. Both fathers in *The Metamorphosis* and in *The Judgment* prostitute the daughter, or the future daughter-in-law. As the conveyor of sadism, the Father in the *Judgement* sentences the family to disbandment, when he exhibits primordial impatience towards the fiancée: Because she lifted up her skirts, because she lifted up her skirts like this, the revolting creature... you went after her, and in order to have your way with her undisturbed, you have disgraced our mother's memory,

betrayed your friend, and stuck your father into bed so that he can't move. Whether or not the Friend is a lie, his position as mediator of love is unquestionable. Bendemann is tied to his father, in a sense that no female figure is welcomed. That way, a threesome, male love relation is structured among the Sadistic Father (Judge), the Son, and the Friend. Bendemann's primordial wish, in fact, is directed towards the ideal Father/Symbolical Order. Apart from its neoteny, this is a lawless love, more specifically, love for the Law, love greater than the Law. It presents not just the end of procreation, but the end of the Order, as well. Due to the collapse of values in the Patriarchal body, the one who stays - Samsa - is killed, and the one who leaves - Bendemann - commits suicide. In a way, Bendemann suicide is a female one, if we take into consideration Kristeva's distinction of female and male suicides. The male one is an expression of the antagonism towards the Father, and respectively, God, in terms of determination of the being. In a way, Samsa deliberately exposes himself to being murdered by his Father - that is how he expresses his antagonism towards the Symbolic Order. When it comes to Bendemann, it is about suicide as freeing from will or from identity - it is not as much an expression of antagonism, as it is an exit, similar to the exile. An exile from the Symbolic Order.

### **A Melancholic Remark: Strategy or Tactics?**

Seven years after *The Metamorphosis* and *The Judgment*, Kafka wrote a long and painful Letter to Father. With deep melancholy, he confessed the broken will of the Son when faced with the prohibitive nature of the Father. As opposed to the Sons in his short stories, Kafka made tactical, not strategic solutions. The difference is in the time and the planning: strategy's Subject plans its operation, while tactics' Subject acts only when it feels directly jeopardized. Kafka, whose letter can be read as an effort of the tactician, never actually sent this Letter to Father. Although he saw his father as a pragmatic patriarch and tyrant, Kafka chose to live near him even in his adult years. His entire work is an evidence of the ambiguity of the Symbolic Order and the lethality of not having a strategic position for defense from it. Or an evidence of the fundamental impossibility to actually have one.

Regardless. Kafka lead his life consciously subverting it - he spent his daytime doing routine office work, and his night writing. Is this not one of the facets of the Son's terrorism against the Symbolic Order? A passive-aggressive solution, alike that of Samsa. A pessimistic response, similar to the pessimism of his Sons. Kafka tried Bendemann's recipe - exile, only once. He left for Berlin, to distance himself from the family ties and to dedicate himself to writing. That was in 1923, and he past away only one refugee year later.