



## Identities in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) and *In the Penal Colony* (1919)



Solenne Lestienne<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

My intention is to understand the logic of power and subsequently, of identical questions, in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and *In the Penal Colony*. Ranging from the splitting up of the self to the corporeal violence it undergoes, the logic of identity brings about the idea of fracture. Rather interestingly, Kafka's writing couples organic texture and distanced tone to represent the ego's fissures. Being torn asunder and particularly concerned with paradoxes, he himself was caught between profound despair and a strong will to survive. What is more, his sense of persistent self-devaluation encompasses complex consciousness, which determines identical hybridism and palimpsestic layers of self-definition. In his works, relationships are hierarchical and often vertical. The main point actually resides in the disproportionate conflict between undefined tyrannical authorities and singular beings whose identical landmarks are literally crushed down. In this way, in his short texts, Kafka puts forward his mistrust in mankind and expounds a form of dark pessimism. The notion of irresolution and of impeached identity eventually comes up, foregrounding the abolition of hopes and of humanist illusions. Kafka's stylistic devices consisting in favouring details and metonymies may be assimilated to a magnifying lens through which absurdity is painfully enlightened and through which the individual is shown as completely unarmed.

**Keywords:** Identities, individual, authority, tyranny, metatextuality, absurdity

Kafka was peculiarly invaded with doubts about himself and about his art. Before dying, he asked his friend, Max Brod, to burn the totality of his works; however, Brod disobeyed. All along his existence, Kafka's most personal identity turned out split over. Chronically facing psychological ups and downs, he was a highly tormented person suffering from his father's tyranny which marked his childhood. His troubles ranged from unsteady relationships with women to very profound skepticism. Kafka mistrusted human exchanges uncompromisingly. Except for the very last months he spent with Dora, he found it impossible to accept traditional marital life as with Felice Bauer. He had a genuinely dystopian vision of the world which matched up his aversion to humanity which he shared with a myriad of 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals. Being regarded as an absurdist by Camus and as an existentialist by Sartre, Kafka was not used to providing solutions to chaos in his writings which evoke pessimistic and sombre parables.

For Kafka, pangs of lacking identity are closely interlaced with absurdity. If Camus suggests rebellion to counterbalance nonsense, Kafka shows antithetical reactions to meaninglessness. For example, his acknowledged sense of humour contradicts a graphic lack of trust in redemption and in

<sup>1</sup> An independent scholar living in Paris, graduated from l'Université Paris Diderot, Paris 7, with a Master of Arts degree in English. Email: [sol.1@wanadoo.fr](mailto:sol.1@wanadoo.fr)

any form of happy resolution, which induces a two-faceted attitude. Technically, his *modus operandi* consists in setting a nonsensical and illogical situation in which single beings are identically entangled, which accounts for the introduction of the adjective “Kafkaesque” into common language. The stake of Kafka's texts chiefly resides in the unfair and unequal battle between single identities and vaguely contoured, mysterious and alienating authorities. Tournaux and Monjot point out Kafka's quest of “his own truth”<sup>2</sup> and of “intimacy”<sup>3</sup> in a context marked by “an oscillation between the fault, the inexorable evil, the conviction that a totality is to be found and finally, the possible path to achieve one's goals”<sup>4</sup>. The corpus is clearly concerned with a sense of identical enclosure – both inwardly and outwardly - which gives way to individual tragedies. *Metamorphosis* is about a character whose identity changes overnight and which causes him to be abandoned by his own kin in an obnoxious place which mirrors lethal perdition. *In the Penal Colony*, which revolves around a demonic machine in a totalitarian system, is *de facto* connected with human isolation as the scene is set on an island with very few witnesses. Kafka defines the self as lonesome and vulnerable being at grips with the “uncanny” and with the impossibility to rebel. The “parceled”<sup>5</sup> and immensely fragmented identity is at the centre of Kafka's consideration of selfhood.

One of my aims is to stress the role of authorities in the shattering, and potentially, in the destruction of the self in a selection of Kafka's works. Permanently, identity is ravaged, which often leads to dehumanization. Frequently, Kafka's treatment of the theme is distinctly ambivalent and complex.

I will prove that the decline of the bug or the action of the torture machine are dealt with as allegories. The logic of power and of its violence will be dissected to grasp the unusual texture which characterizes Kafka's writing. Eventually, I will draw a parallel with the film *Brazil* and with today's globalization which brings on the shaking up of identical milestones.

Throughout his lifetime, Kafka was confronted to the central question of identity. The significant sentence he utters “nothing lacks except myself”<sup>6</sup> outlines his idiosyncratic sentiment of dispossession and the idea that his world is devoid of ontological unity. Kafka was self-divided, being caught between inward psychic torture and organic shame of his own body. Both internally or externally, he underwent obsessive self-devaluation. At this point, the harmful influence of his father played a notable role. Referring to his past, Kafka gave additional weight to his father's despotic demeanour towards his family and his employees. The construction of the self and the identical continuum were threatened by the obscure spectre of paternal authority. The notion that a conflict is engaged with the figure of the father may be suggestively related to Freud's assertion that life drive and death drive cohabit together. This bilateral and concomitant presence saturates Kafka's texts and enlightens the way the author handles the theme of identity. In *Metamorphosis*, Gregor is to cope with a new uncomfortable anatomic transformation. I underline the paradox between his persistent and positive idea to go back to work in the incipit, which epitomizes life appetite, and the deep depressive trends which outburst afterward. Somewhat differently, in *The Penal Colony*, the interest of the officer in the mechanism of the apparatus is passionate; however, he will be ground by the very machine he praised excessively. Here, contradictions are alluded to through evocative dual destinies. As far as Kafka is concerned, suicidal thoughts were always intermingled with a strong will to feel alive<sup>7</sup>. To Kafka, fiction and autobiography are astoundingly intertwined. In parallel, Tournaux mentions Kafka's “inability to live on his own and, at a time, his impossibility to live with someone.”<sup>8</sup>

2 Martine Tournaux et Jean Monjot, *Franz Kafka, L'Être en procès*, Editions: Résonnances, 2010, p. 17.

3 *Ibid*, p. 16.

4 *Ibid*, p. 74. (my translation)

5 Denis Salas, *Le Combat avec la loi*, Paris : Michalon Editeur, 2013, p. 72.

6 Tournaux and Monjot, p. 17. (quoting Kafka)

7 *Ibid*, p. 17.

8 Tournaux, p. 65. “Il se sent une inaptitude à vivre seul et une impossibilité à vivre avec quelqu'un.” (my translation)

In addition, I dare evoke the alternation between states of unfathomable despair and phases of euphoria which governed his soul, implying psychic divergence.

That is how binary schemes emerge as leitmotifs. They particularly show through hybridism. In *Metamorphosis*, the cockroach is a clumsy animal gifted with human consciousness. In *The Penal Colony*, the voice of the commandant is mimetically reproduced by the voice of the officer, which creates a two-sided person speaking one single voice. Kafka was several and one as well. Marthe Robert advocates that “every circumstance in Kafka's existence contributes to split out his self into two parts”<sup>9</sup>, which connotes painful tearing out. Systematically, in a nagging way, Kafka's experiment with ipseity is related to inner separateness. At this point, Kafka's relation to existentialism may be approached. According to Sartre, the being is determined by no predefined vocation nor acknowledged fate. In Kafka's works, the question of the self's responsibility is terribly obscure. Being as palpable as inaccessible, the question generates uneasiness in the evolution of the characters.

Ces récits sont composés d'éclats de miroir brisé de sa propre vie. Tous ses personnages sont le fruit d'un croisement qui exprime leur étrangeté au monde. Tous vivent cette situation dans la souffrance silencieuse de l'animal, les contradictions de la chair ou le regret de la condition perdue.<sup>10</sup>

Globally, the abyssal fracture and the two-folded pattern diminish the individual vitality and blurs its identical contours in the same way as isolation or corporal alienation endanger the survival of the self. In the corpus, three aspects tend to make the being fragile. First, when it is deeply split over, ineluctably torn out. Second, when it is enclosed, physically isolated. Third, when its identity is subject to corporeal violence from others.

In *Metamorphosis*, the cockroach is on the threshold between humanity and animality. Hybridism forbids all access to comfortable identity, as the in-between situation infers matter-of-fact dilemmas. For example, motion is made difficult as if something acquired – the idea of moving one's body – had been sorely displaced. There is self-scattering such as in *The Penal Colony* in which the “condemned man” is both human and dehumanized (“He doesn't know his own sentence”, p. 134).

My second point is that isolation is a cause of individual weakening. In *Metamorphosis*, Gregor is to stay alone in his room in which he experiences lethal seclusion. The reader himself is in a state of suffocation, being literally plunged into a claustrophobic and poisonous atmosphere. The principle of bringing the reader close to death through the fictional prism recalls the long and anguished soliloquy produced by the character with no name, in death row, whom Hugo stages in *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*<sup>11</sup>. A feeling of unsustainable solitude bursts out as in Kafka's defeatist texts. Loneliness is similarly to be found in *The Penal Colony* in which the island is utterly set-apart, which allows the worst crimes to be committed with impunity. In the story, the traveler boards on an island, attends tortures and leaves. The whole scene is watched by very few witnesses, which encourages every type of concealed exactions.

Certainly, in Kafka's realm, the theme of violence is interwoven with the abrupt relation to otherness. When the ego's existence depends on the others' power, a hierarchical relation between the strong and the weak is established. One of the burning questions lays upon the contest between personal perceptions and external influence. The unity of the self is often invalidated by otherness, sometimes literally, through corporeal appropriation. For instance, identity has often something to do with physical external threats, and even with excessive pain. In *Metamorphosis*, “Gregor's body [is]

9 Marcel Bélanger, *La question de l'identité chez Kafka: une entrevue de Marthe Robert*. Nuit blanche, 1983, p. 20-22. " Il n'y a pas de circonstance dans la vie de Kafka qui n'ait contribué à le diviser en deux parties." (my translation)

10 *Ibid*, p. 77-78. “These stories are made of the whirled asunder pieces providing from the broken mirror of Kafka's own life. All his characters are the result of a complex imbroglio which reflects their strange relation to the world. All of them experiment with the silent suffering of an animal or with an incoherent corporeal appearance or with a regretfully lost condition” (my translation)

11 Victor Hugo, *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*, Libro: J'ai lu, (1829), 2012.

utterly flat and desiccated”<sup>12</sup>. In *The Penal Colony*, “blood flowed in hundred streams.”<sup>13</sup> The body is attacked in the “full reality”<sup>14</sup> of concrete manifestations. It must be admitted that “the self is first defined by the envelope in which it is wrapped.”<sup>15</sup> Obviously, in Kafka's fiction, the primary needs of the individual are denied. The characters are fully destabilized, which is shown through the caesura between their basic needs and the ill-treatments they are subject to. Being at a time lost and relinquished, the self is exposed to mortal diminution. Besides, even if all the senses should “be considered in the context of a larger unity, a vast one, that of the body in presence with other bodies”<sup>16</sup>, what Merleau-Ponty calls “intercorporéité”<sup>17</sup>, the individual is unassisted. In Kafka's works, self-dispossession is a capital theme coming along with the abolition of basic autonomy. In *Metamorphosis*, illogically, in a situation set as an axiom, a man “[finds] himself changed into a monstrous cockroach in his bed” (*Metamorphosis*, 75), which is the starting point of tragic carelessness. The predicative segment “he finds himself” is significant of an utter lack of decision – he can no more choose his gestures, which causes Gregor to be dependent on his family. Being grounded on a nonsensical verity, the story seals a disastrous physical and identical destiny. In *The Penal Colony*, the term “execution” (*IPC*, 129) is cruelly mentioned at the very beginning. The idea of unacceptable corporeal horror imposed on single beings, whose life is considered as unimportant, is made tangible both textually, through the multiplication of details, and fictionally, through the theme of bodily distortion. In opposition to Hegel's *Dialectic of Master and Slave*, in Kafka's works, no possible turnaround enables the weakest to reverse domination in order to reach equality. There is dismal decadence in the corpus, and also individual wreckage.

In a nutshell, identity is fissured internally and externally; pangs of contradictions permeate psyches and otherness triggers terrifying fragmentation. The solitary and manipulable body is now the plaything of authorial power - its future is in the hands of anonymous might. Metaphorically, I may compare the fight between the individual and the instances of power with the disproportionate contest between David and Goliath, which is inscribed in the dialectical and vertical relationship between the weakest and the strongest. Coping with tyranny, Kafka's victims lose selfhood and identical certainties.

In an inexorable way, *Metamorphosis* and *In the Penal colony* are concerned with dereliction facing dictatorship. The former, as a psychotic and disjunctive<sup>18</sup> structure, lets appear “crack[s]” (*M*, 92) “at regular intervals” (*M*, 93). A scene set on pages 92-93 is tinged at the same time with nonsense and with the idea of intrinsic decline and with negated humanity; as Gregor never drinks the milk his sister gives him, he assumes she will change the nature of his food. Instead of adapting to his new alimentary habits, Grete leaves Gregor in a dirty room which indicates the absolute denial of his primary value. The family, the employer and the tenants silently conspire against Gregor and slowly slay him by showing “incomprehensible” (*M*, 120) indifference. Power implicates the use of violence on every scale and in all proportions. Pervading every corner conspicuously, it is nonetheless handled by Kafka via suggestive and slight touches. For instance, the last word of the story is “body” (*M*, 126); yet, unexpectedly, it does not refer to Gregor's who has just “perished” (*M*, 122) but to the body of his sister whose “young” (*M*, 126) life restarts out of the ashes of her brother. From a hermeneutic point of view, Gregor's dead body is replaced by a neat one that society elects and

12 Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis and In the Penal Colony*, in *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, Penguin Books, 2007, p. 123.

13 Franz Kafka, p. 154.

14 Michel Bernard, *Le Corps*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995, p. 7.

15 Tournaux, “le moi est d'abord l'image de la peau comme enveloppe”, p. 155.

16 Bernard, “si l'on veut [...] cette unité [...] de nos sens [...], il faut la situer dans une unité plus vaste [...] celle de mon corps avec les autres corps”, p. 52.

17 *Ibid*, p. 53.

18 Hélène Stork, *Dictionnaire de la Psychanalyse*, Encyclopedia Universalis, Paris: Albin Michel, 1997, p. 688 : «chez le psychotique “sans identité, sans image [...] la continuité n'existe pas.» (“For the psychotic being, who has no identity nor idea of himself, there is no continuity.” (my translation)

tolerates. Kafka's ways are to accentuate the scope of violence through the evocation of details. In the example above, eugenic renewal is hinted at; still, nothing is neatly accounted for. The escalation of horror is expressed subtly and coldly.

The authorial power (the family unit in *Metamorphosis* and the bureaucratic system as in *The Penal Colony*) is linked to academic rigidity and to the rejection of any change. It is above all through minutiae that Kafka evokes overwhelming and insidious power. He inserts tiny events so as to examine specifically the aftermath of a single grain of sand in the gears. For instance, a new way of life provides from Gregor's transformation. Though, in the incipit, the huge bustle merely comes from a very small element, namely the right time for Gregor to wake up; it is a quarter to seven and Gregor, who is supposed to wake up at four O'clock and leave at five, is not ready yet. Sternly, the family or the other social structures, being built up on intolerance, do not accept modification. Bringing about nonsense, institutions urge unsolvable<sup>19</sup> situations to take place. To render dead end, Kafka makes up "a symbolical writing which opens the passage from the particular to the general"<sup>20</sup>. Choosing to use details with no pathos nor emphasis<sup>21</sup>, he abruptly describes whirled asunder selves plunged into "lost humanity"<sup>22</sup> and complete "chaos"<sup>23</sup>. Details are exemplary, serving a tragic meaning saturated with "monstrous" (*M*, 75) injunctions to be normal, absolutely molded into formats.

As I suggest, the stratification of Kafka's writing is imbued with an accurate attention to details and with a neutral tone which promulgates universality. Marthe Robert declares that German language was not Kafka's mother-tongue; thence, he did not dare to experiment freely with a language which was not absolutely his. Consequently, the formal neutrality which comes out of his works participates in the nightmarish nature of his anti-conventional discourse by creating a contrast. As a reminiscence of Camus's *L'Etranger*<sup>24</sup>, distance is the cornerstone of all Kafka's stylistic options. Furthermore, even details may be seen as euphemisms. They are foils to the crucial absence of logic as in *The Penal Colony*. In this text, the narrative opens *in medias res* on the evocation of a sheer "piece of equipment" (*IPC*, 129). This genuine item is part of a torture machine about whose functioning the officer proudly and absurdly converses ("detailed information"; *IPC*, 135). Precision reinforces horror and underrated statements point up absurdity. The two writings are all the more ghastly as every gesture is punctuated and specifically notified. For example, Salas mentions the importance of "simple gestures."<sup>25</sup> The classical perception of bearings is questioned as well as life is presented as obtruded.

At this point, I intend to examine more specifically Kafka's complex, nonlinear and quite ambivalent handling of identity. Beyond what was said earlier, the nature of identity is not exactly one-sided in the two stories.

From a particular standpoint, the clarity of Kafka's protocol may be seen as confused. In *The Penal Colony*, the absence of names may be considered as the evidence of identical vagueness. The traveler and the other characters are solely determined by their functions. In this case, identity does not exist as itself - It is merely allegorical. In *Metamorphosis*, the hero is precisely described even if, factually, he is both a human being and a bug. Unlike *In the Penal Colony*, one can figure out his appearance and feel his organic existence (all his bodily difficulties are pointed out). What remains true is that Kafka's speech is symptomatically devoid of affection, sounding cold and detached. On page 137, the adverb "repeatedly" is representative of the pernicious process which prompts dehumanization. Still, whereas the "condemned man" is confronted with his doom anonymously and

19 "he was unable to make sense of it", p. 137. (*Penal Colony*)

20 *Ibid*, p. 17.

21 *Ibid*, p. 16.

22 See Alain Finkielkraut. He wrote an essay on 20<sup>th</sup> century horrific events and evoked totalitarian regimes, camps, killings in camps.

23 Salas, p. 49.

24 Albert Camus, *L'Etranger*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1942.

25 Salas, p. 79.

is reduced to the status of a disembodied victim in *The Penal Colony*, Gregor may awaken the reader's sympathy and invoke compassion in *Metamorphosis* in an unexpected way. Therefore, being incarnate and vaporous, concrete and symbolical, the characters are hybrid, complex and nonexistent at the same time. The building up of true identity is persistently hampered, essentially unattainable. No minimal ontological achievement is allowed.

Derrida's concept of "différance" is to be looked into here. Derrida argues that an end should be put to idealism and to fixed structures in order to allow shifts of meaning and the expression of personal freedom. Similarly, Kafka denounces dogmas like "capitalism and other systems which impose themselves as infallible and which promulgate one absolute truth, putting the original self in danger and forbidding it to be identical to itself."<sup>26</sup> The absence of meaning may be assessed in the light of the absence of identical liberties. Both corroborate the idea that imprisonment is to be found in the intimate self as much as in its social status. That is why the essential ambition of authorial instances is to create turmoil and confusion in an attempt to diminish the importance of individual moods and to prevent the growth of any seed of revolt. Being isolated and derelict in a manipulative vortex, identities turn out inoffensive. Hence, dehumanization forces irrationality. A sentence from Michael Löwy corroborates this idea: "Kafka montre comment cette rationalité mutilée et instrumentale conduit à la plus parfaite irrationalité."<sup>27</sup>

In all cases, the characters cannot get accomplished identically, which withdraws sense from their living experience. In addition, Kafka invokes the extinction of meaning as a component of human folly. A parallel may be drawn between the stories of the corpus and the film *Brazil*, by Terry Gilliam, in which no individual redemption in today's societies is made possible either. In *Brazil*, a fly constitutes the first detail of the film. Being trapped up in the typewriter, it triggers a name misspelling which will later on provoke the death of an innocent man whose body will never be brought back to his family. Terry Gilliam inspects both the abysses of bureaucratic systems and the concept of globalization which absorbs details and causes identical bearings to implode, leaving an illogical and mad perception of the world.

Dans ce monde si riche en informations en perpétuel changement, notre conscience cognitive a tendance à se fragmenter, à perdre son unité. La psyché comporte une composante schizoïde, voire autistique<sup>28</sup>

In *Brazil*, landmarks are devastated as in Kafka's works. Clearly, the two artists debate the notions of subordination, of formats, and of implacable machinery destroying the being.

the neoliberal utopia tends to embody itself in the reality of a kind of infernal machine, whose necessity imposes itself even upon the rulers.

As the dominant discourse would have it, the economic world is a pure and perfect order, implacably unrolling the logic of its predictable consequences, and prompt to repress all violations by the sanctions that it inflicts, maximisation of individual profit, which has been turned into a model of rationality.<sup>29</sup>

In modern societies, surviving identically is absolutely impeded. In *Brazil*, when he is dreaming, the hero imagines he is metamorphosed into a modern knight fighting the enemy, which turns him into a resistant character who rebels through the development of his own personal fantasy. A pan is used to

26 Tournaux, p. 18 (my translation).

27 Michael Löwy, *Franz Kafka, Rêveur insoumis*, Paris: Stock, 2004, introduction. "Kafka explains how mutilated and instrumental rationality leads to the most edifying irrationality."

28 Patrick Rouillier, "Identité et mondialisation", *On peut tout dire (Eco & Socio)*, 2016 <http://www.rouillier.com/wordpress-socioeco>

"In this world which is excessively informed and perpetually changing, our cognition tends to get fragmented and to lose its wholeness. The psyche is composed of a schizoid part, even an autistic one." (my translation)

29 Pierre Bourdieu, <https://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu>

follow Sam who, being gifted with wings, overflies the world. Thus, revolt consists in keeping the intimate space free and inaccessible even though no epiphany is conceivable. In *Brazil*, pipes, which represent omnipresent power, are like gigantic snakes which imprison the population and pervade all the living space. Details such as the typewriter encapsulate the secret traceability of private information concerning the inhabitants. In comparison with *In the Penal Colony*, even in a metatextual way, the typewriter recalls the machine which inscribes the name of the crimes on the body of the convicted person. Scriptural devices may be resorted to as a tool to exert power.

In a context of automatized and overruled daily life, the society is controlled by awe. Enforcement officers pop up everywhere, eradicating all forms of liberty. There are crucial problems with name misspellings, with the imperatives to remain young thanks to plastic surgery, and with the memorization of individual acts and thoughts. Symbols of totalitarian systems are particularly luxuriant; the importance of paper forms and of screens and of advertising slogans (the injunction to be happy recurs) and of overcrowded places dictated by duty and blind obedience is inferred by tyrannical domination. Today's globalization is dangerous for the same reasons. Being vaguely identified, authority alienates the individual by making confused the role of the Big Other which Lacan<sup>30</sup> defines as an essential symbolic structure. Facing paradoxical, even perverse imperatives, the being is bullied into clinging to dominant formats.

The role played by bird's eye views and low angle shots is emblematic of power game which grounds a dialectical master and slave relation; "there will be nothing except for the power of the market or a mere interest in profit and economic efficiency."<sup>31</sup>

In *Brazil*, there is a labyrinth-like space made of horizontal corridors, of multiple stairs and of lifts which work vertically. The characters are trapped up in every corner, going every contradictory way. Furthermore, the being is involved into a process of intimidation. Numbers, for instance, abound and reflect a world which none can really figure out. The external realm is apocalyptic. Mirrors are broken. Explosions happen anytime. The quest of the hero seems to be engraved in an endless and dead-locked itinerary. Each of his steps is hindered. While he is putting up with the impossibility to clarify the very confused logic of institutions, Sam comes and meets Jill Layton – with whom he falls in love deeply – who is submerged by paper forms and who is surrounded by mad organization. She is the concerned witness to a tragic error, and striving to restore truth, she gets lost in daedal corridors, coping with ill-faithed employees and with tampered information. At one point, a bird eye's view shows Sam staring at Jill from above. In the scene, she endeavours to make herself understand by a stubborn employee and runs into inexorable bureaucracy. She will never succeed in reestablishing justice. The two lovers will die even though a trace of hope has been briefly envisaged by the on-looker.

Eventually, the fact that the film is set in no particular place – it is merely called "somewhere", creates anxiety since the world in perdition can be any other world, even ours. If one extrapolates, it can be displaced anywhere else. Neither love nor dream nor rebellion is susceptible to vanquish the iniquity of modern societies. Conveying the idea of dystopia, *Brazil* is a disenchanting work of art. Little by little, gloom permeates the whole atmosphere. In the last scene, the torture undergone by Sam recalls *In the Penal Colony*. The corresponding epilogues foreground dolorous death as inevitable. The being stands for a powerless pawn in a wide over-codified environment with complicated and incomprehensible data. Falling apart, Sam's identity is, like many others', dolorously dissolved.

To conclude, in the same manner as in *Brazil*, the end of the two stories offers no redemption. The first-person narrative allows the reader to attend, on the one hand, a metamorphosis narrated on a destructive mode, and on the other hand, killings caused by a daemonic machine whose importance

30 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1973 ( the Big Other is a clear and radical alterity)

31 Mitrovi, Ljubisa, "Bourdieu's criticism of the neoliberal philosophy of development, the myth of mondialization and the new Europe", Facta Universitatis, 2005  
<http://facta.junis.ni.ac.rs/pas/pas2005/pas2005-05.pdf>

is defended fanatically by an officer. Leading to deadlocks, the texts are universal parables of a doomed and apocalyptic world.

The reader is stunned by disseminated meanings and miscellaneous identities. No fictional justice is to be expected. Hence, one is invited to resign and to admit irresolution, after deciphering scattered scraps of nonsense powerlessly. The readers get as close as possible to cataclysm. As a reminder of Umberto Eco's thesis in *Lector in Fabula*<sup>32</sup>, the position of the interlocutor is to be cooperative, which drives him to being on the same side as the characters who undergo tyranny. Discouragement is at a hand.

More generally, in *Metamorphosis*, the death of the cockroach resonates as the death of all hopes and of all humanist illusions; in *The Penal Colony*, the tortures generated by the machine trespasses the sentiment of horror. Distortion and dissolution are disastrous conclusions in the three works of art. Anguish and a huge feeling of helplessness cannot be compensated for. Bureaucracy and its obscure intricate passages may be vehicles of depressive abandonment. Injustice and insidious manipulation are clearly parts of power game.

Thus, Terry Gilliam and Kafka have spotted the tentacular ramifications of modern societies and were ahead of the ins and outs of globalization effects. They have created pessimistic fables with no reassuring moral nor happy end. They finish with a “melancholy conclusion. It turns lying into a universal principle”<sup>33</sup> The same unfamiliar and cold objectivity is to be noted in *The Trial* published posthumously in 1925 and whose symbolism emphasizes the rendering of Jewish identity, then of moral matters and finally, of metaphysical questions, which are all symbolical of Kafka's reflexion on human condition that he judged inexorably doomed. The state of our world with pandemics and ecological matters, with globalization as a conveyor of deep inequalities and of the implosion of identities can only give reason to Gilliam's accurate observation and to Kafka's visionary literature.

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**Author's biography:**

Solenne Lestienne is an independent scholar living in Paris, graduated from l'Université Paris Diderot, Paris 7, with a Master of Arts degree in English. She got peculiarly interested in the work of Virginia Woolf and Henry James. Published works include “The Self at Stake in Woolf’s Works and Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (*Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 2007, re-edited in 2012) and “Henry James, D’un monde à l’autre dans *The Portrait of a Lady*” (*Luxembourg Journal*, 2009), “Communication in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* by Virginia Woolf” (*Otherness: Essays and Studies*, 2013), and “Writing: A Space to Survive? Virginia Woolf’s Work and Life” (*Feminist Spaces*, 2016) and “L’Enthousiasme monstrueux dans *Frankenstein*” (Summer 2019, Lamar University, Texas). “Hesitation between Anguish and Hope in Schizophrenia: the paradigm of Woolf’s Fiction in a selected corpus”, will be published in January.