

**Kafka's Copycats: Imitation, Fabulism, and Late Modernism**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents

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## ABSTRACT

It's often noted that Franz Kafka's influence on 20th-century world literature is immense and that his two most touted novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*, helped late modernists and their postmodernist successors articulate theological and epistemological skepticism, anxieties about bureaucratic tyranny, and Jewish trauma in the wake of the Holocaust. Yet Kafka's creative and critical reception in Anglo-American culture has been largely misunderstood, especially during the period of his initial impact, circa 1933-1955. This project focuses on the large-scale integration of Kafka's fables—his short stories about animals, hybrids, and assemblages—into Anglophone writing during the late modernist period. The dominant narratives about his reception render invisible the powerful effect of these supposedly minor texts on British and American literature. I argue that the fable genre, which has been construed as fallow for the greater part of the 20th century, was reanimated and disseminated largely due to Kafka's work.

A counterintuitive network of transatlantic writers are the media through which this dissemination took place: the Scots Willa and Edwin Muir, the first translators of Kafka's novels and stories into English, whose own poems and prose narratives do surprising things with the Kafkan fable; leftwing radicals such as W.H. Auden and Christopher Caudwell, who opened up their Marxisms to zoological discourses via Kafka; surrealists like Leonora Carrington, Anna Kavan, and William Sansom, who were excited by Kafka's explorations of hybridity and

corporeal collage; American poets and practitioners of multiple genres, such as Delmore Schwartz, John Berryman, Elizabeth Bishop, and Sylvia Plath, who, to greater and lesser extents, crafted fables whose nonhumans register psychological (and psychoanalytic) frictions between various individuals and communities; and the Jewish-American fiction writers Paul Goodman, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Saul Bellow, all of whom found Kafka's dogs to be powerful figurations of the "insider-outsider." In an energetic quest for a new language, at the crossroads and impasses of Marxism and psychoanalysis, in a quicksand of competing geopolitical and philosophical forces, late modernists turned to Kafka as a model for a new kind of cosmopolitan and deracinated writing, helping them remap their relationship to the dominant modernisms of their time.

It is striking that the writers in this study frequently wrote direct imitations of Kafka's work. Yet the vast majority of these rewritings have been deemed too minor to warrant critical investigation or have remained in the vaults and boxes of library archives. Oftentimes writers were hesitant or embarrassed to publish work that was patently fantastic or foregrounded the subjectivities of animals or other nonhuman beings. The boom in Anglophone writing inspired by Kafka's fables hasn't been registered by the Kafka industry for other reasons as well, such as the longstanding view that imitation (unlike adaptation and appropriation) is a spurious rather than a transformative cultural practice. By reconsidering and recovering these imitative texts, we encounter short stories, plays, libretti, and poems that closely replicate the particularities of Kafka's formal and thematic tics while taking them in new directions that respond to the exigencies of a period of intense planetary, phylogenetic, and cultural crisis. Kafka opened up an

avenue of temporary or permanent escape from the elaborate stylistics and epic projects of high modernism.

## CHAPTER I

### **Franz Kafka, Imitation, and Late Modernist Fabulism**

This project is and is not about the writer Franz Kafka (Mayhew 9). No writer of the 1930s, 40s, and early 50s was more imitated or rewritten during WWII and the decade preceding and following it. The publication of Kafka's short stories, aphorisms, and novels, translated into English by the accomplished Scottish writers Willa and Edwin Muir, caused such a storm, such a controversy among contemporaries in Britain and America that it was recognized as an event—the Kafka rage, Kafka boom, or Kafka cult. A curious rage, considering that only two of the fifteen writers addressed in this study had any decent command of the German language. Kafka's contributions were, rather, experienced through the distortions and “improvements” of translation during a time in which the German language had been partially extirpated from college curricula and “demonized” in print culture because of its supposed subliminal cultural propaganda (Damrosch 289; Miller 98). As a countercultural Jewish German-language writer standing outside the intense wartime ideological fray, Kafka galvanized writers exhausted with radical politics and desiring a new language to express their mounting skepticism about utopian political solutions and destructive anthropocentric logic.



The Kafka event in mid-century Britain and America has been largely misrepresented by the critical tradition. First of all, and most simply, it is conceived as a predominantly postwar phenomenon, taking place after 1945 rather than beginning right after the publication of Kafka's short story collection *The Great Wall of China* (1933) into English (Medin 3-4; Greif 134, 140). Kafka helped writers escape what they perceived to be dead-ends or traps, especially Communism, Fascism, social realism, and the telltale features of high modernist aesthetics from 1933 to 1945 and beyond. Secondly, Kafka reception studies have agreed that Kafka's three unfinished novels, recovered and edited by his best friend Max Brod--*The Castle* (1930), *The Trial* (1935), and *Amerika* (1938)--are the "mainstay[s] of all critical discussion and explanations of Kafka's significance" for the majority of Kafka's public afterlife (Greif 136; Born 123-7). The former two novels, especially, since their release in the 1930s, have been situated in theological discourses (as explorations of the anxieties and obscurities surrounding divine grace, election, and original sin) that made the novels popular intellectual feeding grounds for an angsty existentialist generation. These novels have produced innumerable "post-Kafkan writers...concerned in one way or another with the question of [often religious] truth" (Sandbank 11-12). Yet there is a powerful subterranean current running through the criticism and especially the fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction of the 1930s, 40s, and early 50s that establishes Kafka's short stories--and especially his animal stories and fables--as an equally (if not more) significant site of Kafka absorption.

In fact, the astounding quantity (and often quality) of the imitations and pastiches of Kafka's fictions about taxonomically or geographically distant strangers (hybrid entities, nonhumans, vampiric nomads of Northern China, etc.) provides an accurate barometer of the

urgency, the need for alternative readings of Kafka than the ones making headlines in the culture industry of the day. No critic has traced, or even been aware of, this fabulist history or genealogy the Jewish-American fiction writers Paul Goodman, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Saul Bellow, all of whom found Kafka's dogs to be powerful figurations of the insider-outsider; in late modernist fiction. Part of the reason for this oversight is a widespread disdain for imitative writing, for the 'reductions' of "source study," in Harold Bloom's words, or "mere imitation," as Julie Sanders writes in her study of adaptation and appropriation (Bloom 7; Sanders 9). Imitation as a practice, however, in its recycling of the particularities of language and precise thematic clusters from its source text(s), is an important form of reception and transmission; it manipulates words and ideas in ways that are simultaneously critical and creative. Rather than dismissing such practices as derivative or aberrant, studying them can paint vastly different pictures of intertextual relationships than those accepted as critical gospel. Such is the case with this project, which considers repetitions, mimicries, and even plagiarisms as luminous fields of inquiry.

Another reason for the blindspot in studies of Anglophone Kafka reception is the bias against Kafka's purportedly less serious, less theologically-oriented and more open-ended and skeptical fables. Minus "The Metamorphosis" and "The Judgment," few critics from 1930-1955 took Kafka's gnomic tales, often dealing with human-animal hybrids or strange corporeal assemblages, as cornerstones of Kafka's thinking. The novels and aphorisms which stated different versions of Kafka's theological positions were more the vogue. Thus the influx of texts about fabulous strangers and nonhumans into transnational creative consciousness was barely registered by contemporary critics, and was very often not taken seriously by the writers who produced such texts--publishing them in the little magazines of the day but leaving them out of

the published collections of their fiction or, quite frequently, never publishing them at all and circulating manuscript versions among friends.

This study is necessarily one of revival and recovery. Even writers who engaged in both critical and creative manipulations of Kafka's ideas and words sometimes privileged the iterations of their work conforming to the popular preference for *The Castle* and *The Trial* and the anthropocentric questions those novels raise. The bulk of the material under scrutiny is largely forgotten or unpublished. This is the case for Willa and Edwin Muir, the first English translators of Franz Kafka--the latter producing critical essays that shaped the reception of Kafka for decades, but whose pastiches of Kafka's animal stories in his autobiography, *The Story and the Fable* (1930), have been entirely overlooked; for W.H. Auden, his romantic partner Chester Kallman, and the communist theorist Christopher Caudwell, all of whom excavated elements of Kafka's fables in order to interrogate the seams and inconsistencies in their own leftist ideologies, but whose works in this vein have been relegated to appendices or left unpublished in manuscript form; for the long-neglected British writers Anna Kavan and William Sansom, who viewed Kafka as a surrealist "thunderhead" and were attracted to his representations of metamorphosis and corporeal hybridity;<sup>1</sup> for the American Jewish writers Paul Goodman, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Saul Bellow, whose rewritings of Kafka's dog stories articulated the anxieties and advantages of cosmopolitanism, but have been forgotten (in Goodman's case) or stored away in archives (in the case of Rosenfeld and Bellow). Even poets like Delmore Schwartz, John Berryman, Elizabeth Bishop, and Sylvia Plath actively partook in this Kafka event, and even though their manipulations of Kafka's short fiction have been published--often in the form of

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<sup>1</sup> André Breton includes a short biographical sketch on Kafka under the heading "Têtes d'orage" ("thunderheads" of the surrealist movement) in the surrealist journal *Minotaure* (1937).

journals, letters, and posthumous collections--little to no attention has been given to their Kafka experiments.

Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote that “one does not imitate Kafka. One does not rewrite him. One has to extract a precious encouragement from his books and look elsewhere” (Sartre 642). More recently, Cynthia Ozick has written that Kafka is one of “those writers who have no literary progeny, who are *sui generis* and cannot be echoed or envied” and Zadie Smith has said that “[Kafka’s] imitators are very few” (Ozick 50; Smith 33-40). In a 2005 book Morris Dickstein declared that Kafka’s work is “not at all depressing and “Kafkaesque” like [his] foolish imitators” (Dickstein 122). Imitating Kafka—from the very beginning of his Anglophone afterlife to the present day—is either discouraged, debased, or the province of a few unspecified writers. Scholars tend to take it for granted that Kafka powerfully influenced late modernist and postmodernist literature—but less frequently does anyone talk about specific imitators or a phenomenon of Kafka pastiche. The sheer number of imitations, and the fact that they were produced amid a matrix of cultural debate about imitation in general, and critical debate about Kafka’s imitators in particular, makes this event special from the perspective of literary historiography.

Writers of the 30s and 40s were well aware (and often scandalized) by the proliferation of Kafka imitations. As early as 1939, Christopher Isherwood was claiming that Kafka “is not often successfully imitated” (Isherwood 255). Philip Rahv called the “imitations [of Kafka] that have been turning up of late...one-sided and even inept” (Rahv 485). Others label his imitators as “wrong-headed,” producing “watered” down works whose potential is “immediately exhausted,”

using only superficial and “clever machinery borrowed from [Kafka]” (Happenstall 283; Hardwick 320; Barrett 8). Another critic writes in a 1947 issue of *Sewanee Review* that “although the active and eloquent cult of his admirers probably makes him a writer of major influence, Kafka so far is better represented by his critics and exegetes than by his imitators” (Hendry 700). Anatole Broyard’s experience of postwar Greenwich Village is representative of the literary fervor surrounding the publication of Kafka’s work; in his book *Kafka Was the Rage* (1997), he writes that “Kafka was as popular in the Village at that time as Dickens had been in Victorian London...and people would rush in [to his bookstore] wild-eyed, almost foaming at the mouth, willing to pay anything for Kafka” (Broyard 31). Kafka indeed went viral, generating waves of copycats who replicated his fiction in quite explicit terms. In a recent book, Mark Greif insightfully documents the “enshrining” of Kafka in postwar America (Greif 134). He posits the *terminus post quem* for the boom for Kafka imitation at around 1945—a distinctly peacetime phenomenon. The British writers Rex Warner and William Sansom, whom we’ll meet in Chapter 3, were the most visible and contentious Kafka imitators of the day, but their fiction was always interpreted in the framework of politico-theological fears and anxieties. They were offered up as exemplars of the Kafka effect because they manipulated the novels rather than the short texts.

From 1933 to the onset of the Cold War, Germany was, of course, a source of fixation and anxiety for most Allied writers. The wildfire sparked by the Nazis on the geopolitical landscape made an iconoclastic Jewish-Czech fabulist, an outlier dead before the Third Reich, one of the good Germans—one of the “people in defeat,” as Christopher Isherwood termed Kafka and Brecht, who offered critical angles from inside enemy lines. “These German artists,” Isherwood continues, “are on our side. They are our allies. Dead or alive, they fight with us,

against the forces which strangled Art in their country and threaten now to strangle it in our own” (Isherwood 255). By imitating Kafka’s work, writers and thinkers could occupy (or imagine themselves occupying) an exhilarating and dangerous imaginative frontier, at both the center and periphery, in between languages and cultures. Most scholars writing about Kafka’s impact on Anglo-American writing construe the brutal, bureaucratic worlds of the two most famous novels as prophetic of the Holocaust; and one of the reasons the Kafka rage is imagined to have begun after 1945 has to do with the fact that such a narrative aligns neatly with the idea that Kafka is primarily a prophet of fascist atrocity. Yet the root of the rage for imitating Kafka in Anglophone culture is only partly contextual and war-driven and much different from what scholars of Kafka reception have supposed—deriving far less from the epic novels than from Kafka’s uncanny minor tales, *die Fabeln und Erzählungen*—and in particular Kafka’s reanimation of the animal or beast fable, starting with the stories published in the Muirs’ *The Great Wall of China* collection in 1933.

Kafka’s work is vastly multiple, irreducible--despite robust attempts by legions of critics--to psychoanalytic, existentialist, Jewish, Zionist, Calvinist, political, or contextual (his Prague environment) factors. The artists under scrutiny--artists who often doubled as critics but used their criticism to undermine dominant hermeneutic paradigms of the day--found these interpretative contradictions generative rather than irreconcilable. The mediations and distortions of translation caused these writers little anxiety, but was, rather, part and parcel of what they embraced as Kafka’s inherent multiplicity. They used words like skepticism, agnosticism, and anarchism to describe Kafka’s resistance--especially in his short animal stories--to the reductions of analytic argument or logically coherent acts of interpretation. The “empty discourse” of

Kafka's fables, that seems to make original claims about the truth or the historical moment but in fact only "generates the continuation of attempts" and "tacitly admits to unanswerability" made his work malleable, relevant to protean geopolitical demarcations and bodies, cultures, and ideologies in extreme states of flux (Greif 12).

*The Castle* and *The Trial*, because of the theological and political interpretations grafted onto them (even through the Muirs' translation choices, as will become clear in Chapter 1), became quarries for communist writers like Rex Warner who sought to instrumentalize the novels' ideological elements to make implicit arguments for the correctness of communism and the corruptness of fascism and liberalism. The animal stories, on the other hand, were never bent to such explicit purposes. The imitators and rewriters of Kafka's fables tended to be politically progressive yet relatively inactive, at moments of postwar crisis and indecision (transitioning from communism to liberalism, in the case of Auden). Even hardline and active communists, like Christopher Caudwell, used Kafka's "uncanny" fiction as a means to explore the "chinks" in his ideological "armour" (Caudwell, "Uncanny Stories" xi). Others, such as Paul Goodman, channeled Kafka in order to express overtly anarchist desires that rejected non-contingent political thought structures.

Rewritings of Kafka are often braided with psychoanalytic strands that emphasize the "atavistic tendencies," the animalistic and Dionysian elements buried in the unconscious mind (Seitler 1). Imitations of Kafka's work "struggle against versions of the human that assume the animal as its opposite" and fight against discourses of sovereignty, mastery, and dominion-- against discourses of naturalness and taxonomic closure (Butler 34; Singh 10). A recognition of a

lost alterity, the repressed nonhuman within the human causing mankind to be sick, stoked these writers to rethink anthropocentric hubris through their acts of rewriting (Nietzsche 13).

Deleuze and Guattari claim in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986) that minor literatures express a state of a writer being a “stranger *within* his own language” (Deleuze and Guattari 26). My study respectfully demurs from their primarily socio-cultural concentration—and most of contemporary Kafka criticism’s—on Kafka’s context and language situation (although this will certainly play a role in his creative reception that won’t be neglected).<sup>2</sup> After all, Kafka took great pains to normalize and deracinate his German for publication and rejected the minoritization that they imagine him to express. But I find their insights crucial to thinking about the impact Kafka had on foreign writers formally, generically, and thematically, responding to his reconfiguration of the minor genre of fable, which is highly cosmopolitan and transmissive and dramatizes the entanglement of human and nonhuman. The fable allowed them, for long periods of time or temporarily, to estrange themselves from dominant aesthetic traditions (e.g. the novel, the *bildungsroman*) in order to occupy a fresh, indeterminate, and minor space. The fact that so much material in this study derives from uncollected or unpublished stories and the fruits of archival research hammers home the exclusionary impulse editors, the publishing industry, and even writers themselves have demonstrated towards the genres of imitation and the beast fable, often conceiving them as unofficial arenas of experiment.

Kafka was a major source for the revival of the fable genre in Britain and America. It was Kafka’s animal stories and fables that were the main sites of exploratory rewriting for this

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance: Spector, Scott. *Prague Territories: Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (2002); Leavitt, June O. *The Mystical Life of Franz Kafka: Theosophy, Cabala, and the Modern* (2012); Bruce, Iris. *Kafka and Cultural Zionism: Dates in Palestine* (2007).



study's subjects. An awareness of the entanglement of the animal story--the term Kafka preferred for stories like "Jackals and Arabs" and "A Report to an Academy"--and the fable was even a minor topic of the time. Paul Goodman, one of the Jewish American Kafka imitators addressed in Chapter 4, wrote a rarely referenced critical monograph on Kafka, called *Kafka's Prayer* (1947), which happened to be the first book-length study on the writer in the English language. In it, Goodman writes that:

Fables are stories in which animals act like men [and] [a]nimal stories are stories in which they act as themselves. Kafka's beasts are handled in both these ways...because he makes an identification of man and beast (Goodman 260).

Beasts or non-humans are perhaps better words than animals, since Kafka employs a litany of objects, human-animal hybrids, and assemblages in his fabulist texts. But the point is that a particular genre, form, and thematic bundle piqued the interest of large numbers of writers and propelled them to acts of absorption. The word fable (and the larger genre, fabulism) will thus be used more than "animal story," although, as Goodman notes, these two genres that decenter the human blend together and are not entirely distinct. While the parable is frequently used as a near-synonym for Kafka's short texts, even in the 30s and 40s, the particular set of stories that materialized in late modernist writers' work were less anthropocentric, less theologically-oriented than the classical parable tends to be; so, for our purposes, the term fable will carry a heavier and more serviceable semantic load. A decade before Goodman's study, this topic was fielded, too. Horace Gregory notes the impact of Franz Kafka on writers like W.H. Auden, wondering if all "these stories [in the 1937 volume of *New Writing in America*] were to be read as fables" (Gregory 11). Fifteen years later, Nym Wales in the "Foreword" to her story collection

*Fables and Parables of the Midcentury* (1952), asserts that: “The animal and vegetable fable belongs to the old horse-and-buggy era, but the machine and mineral fable to the future” (Wales 3). One of her artistic goals is to move beyond the fables of Kafka, which--using his “Prometheus” as an example--should stop being championed and proliferated (by the likes of W.H. Auden), because Kafka’s fables “speak the language of nihilism [and]...meaninglessness...valid for his period but not for ours” (4).

Before moving further, it’s necessary to unpack a typical Kafkan fable that served as a locus of plunder for late modernists like Anna Kavan. What are the stylistic and thematic elements of a Kafkan fable? How does the Kafkan fable express cosmopolitan desires? These are some of the questions a closely analyzed specimen will help us to answer.

Rather than looking at a popular short text like “Cares of a Family Man,” “A Little Fable,” and “A Crossbreed” (all of which will come into play in subsequent chapters), let’s spend some time with Kafka’s “The Bridge,” since it speaks to the motif of the assemblage and is a text that—in the spirit of this study—flies under the radar of the majority of Kafka criticism engaging with the nonhuman:

I WAS stiff and cold, I was a bridge, I lay over a ravine. My toes on one side, my fingers clutching the other, I had clamped myself fast into the crumbling clay. The tails of my coat fluttered at my sides. Far below brawled the icy trout stream. No tourist strayed to this impassable height, the bridge was not yet traced on any map. So I lay and waited; I could only wait. Without falling, no bridge, once spanned, can cease to be a bridge.

It was toward evening one day -- was it the first, was it the thousandth? I cannot tell—my thoughts were always in confusion and perpetually moving in a circle. It was toward evening in summer, the roar of the stream had grown deeper, when I heard the sound of a human step! To me, to me. Straighten yourself, bridge, make ready, railless beams, to hold up the passenger entrusted to you. If his steps are uncertain, steady them

unobtrusively, but if he stumbles show what you are made of and like a mountain god hurl him across to land.

He came, he tapped me with the iron point of his stick, then he lifted my coattails with it and put them in order upon me. He plunged the point of his stick into my bushy hair and let it lie there for a long time, forgetting me no doubt while he wildly gazed around him. But then -- I was just following him in thought over mountain and valley -- he jumped with both feet on the middle of my body. I shuddered with wild pain, not knowing what was happening. Who was it? A child? A dream? A wayfarer? A suicide? A tempter? A destroyer? And I turned around so as to see him. A bridge to turn around! I had not yet turned quite around when I already began to fall, I fell and in a moment I was torn and transpierced by the sharp rocks which had always gazed up at me so peacefully from the rushing water. (Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir)

Rather than spinning this flash fiction piece into a consistent chain of interpretive arguments, it's important to show which particular elements of this representative text were attractive to my writers. The following will be more descriptive than analytical since creative writers tended to approach pieces like this with the questions: "how is this made?" and "how can I achieve these effects?" rather than "what precisely does this mean?" Not that they did not ask such questions, but their answers tended to be multiple, contradictory, open, eccentric.

It almost goes without saying that "The Bridge" is short. This was attractive to writers of fables, which are apt to be brief and their meanings distilled. Kafka's animal stories, like "Investigations of a Dog" and "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk," tend to be longer, but they display the same essential features:

- (1) Geographical occlusion. Where is the mountain pass over which the narrator lies? Except in the novel *Amerika*, "The Great Wall of China," and the rare animal story like "A Report to an Academy," Kafka's narratives are not often mapped onto specific,

onomastically determined places, regions, or states. Even when they are, these spaces (rather than places) are imaginary, porous, and infrequently tethered to historical facts. This makes Kafka's world nomadic, an implicit critique of socio-cultural grids and sovereign power.

- (2) An allegorical style. By using this term, I'm making a slight theoretical intervention and using allegory in an unconventional sense that speaks to issues of form. Kafka's surprising alchemy of stylistic directness and semantic disruption and ambiguity became a calling card for writers adopting the "encoded speech" and linguistic "polysemy" that characterize an allegorical style. This style strives to provoke in the reader a sense of interpretive vertigo and is constituted by three technical pillars (Fletcher 3; Quilligan 26): *Elimination* (of proper geographically-specific nouns and character names, except in cases like "Odradek" and "K.," which are etymologically mysterious on the one hand and utterly generic, like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* or the Pilgrim in *The Divine Comedy*, etc., on the other), *ambiguity* (related to geographical occlusion; Kafka deliberately chooses words that spurn contextualization, like "impassible height" over "Alpine pass," or, in other texts, the vague and multiple word "country" over a word like "Austria"), and *interrogation* (that is, litanies of questions, one of Kafka's favorite techniques; in this case: "Who was it? A child? A dream? A wayfarer? A suicide? A tempter? A destroyer?") characterize the late modernist, Kafka-inflected fable much more than the punning and "verbal ambidextrousness" foregrounded in Maureen Quilligan's account of the nature of allegorical other-speak (Quilligan 26). Nominal elimination, ambiguity, and the essayistic investigative mode foregrounding the unanswerable question—key stylistic markers of

Kafka's prose—serve to emphasize process and uncertainty over language that purports to somehow (in the words of Virginia Woolf) “tell the truth” (Woolf 173-4).

- (3) Animals, Hybrids, Assemblages. Kafka's narrator in “The Bridge” is an assemblage, who, like Odradek, “straddles the line between inert matter and vital life” and troubles the boundaries between subject and object, organism and thing, and is in fact what Jane Bennett has termed an expression of “vibrant matter” (Bennett 7). The narrator of “The Bridge” can speak, “clutches,” wears a coat, and has “bushy hair,” yet is a bridge with “railless beams” that does not become lifeless matter once it has been “transpierced by sharp rocks”; on the contrary, it continues to reflect on the past and perform a narrative act. Through Kafka's dogs, mice, horses, cat-lamb-human hybrids, mole-like burrowers, man-bridges, Odradek assemblages, etc., a critique of taxonomies (human and nonhuman distinctions, the ‘natural’ body, and even genre) is mounted and new sets of questions are tendered. By opening up their writing to animals and nonhumans, the writers in this study were engaging with inchoate forms of critical animal studies and post-humanist discourses; they weren't making explicit political arguments, per se, but were participating in radical acts of what Bennett calls “methodological naïveté,” broaching “discredited philosophies of nature” and “avowing the force of questions” rather than definitive answers (Bennett 7). This came at a time when, as Mark Greif has shown in his book *Age of the Crisis of Man* (2015), categories like “man” and “mankind”—not to mention the value and function of creative enterprises—were being hotly debated and redefined as the globe tilted toward ruin.

(4) Violence. The pedagogical or epiphanic moment, even in the Aesopian tradition of fable, succeeds acts of violence, often interspecies violence. This is an element that carries over into the Kafkan fable. We encounter this, for example, at the end of “The Bridge,” where the narrator’s desire--to perform the function of a viable threshold--is thwarted by the wanderer leaping on his back and causing him to plummet to his death. There are many features of the fable that have been only cursorily explored due to the fable’s status as an inherently minor and archaic form of artistic expression, and the function of violence as a conduit to ethical reflection is one of them.<sup>3</sup>

Kafka’s fables, in the spirit of cosmopolitanism (the fable itself, due to the fact it was originally a nomadic oral genre, has a cosmopolitan edge), implicitly expose the artificiality or contingency of concepts of sovereignty, hierarchy, dominion, and mastery. By offering these up as problems, a radical yet somewhat un-pragmatic form of political engagement erupts onto the late modernist scene among those who, due to Kafka’s belated publication history and translation into English--his stories often appeared alongside the works of our writers in little magazines--were seeking a way out of stringent ideologies and outworn aesthetic practices. Kafka was construed as a contemporary who could help break the spell of high modernism and express anxieties about the contingency of man. Recently, more and more work has been done on Kafka’s hybrids in light of critical animal studies, but no one has traced the genealogy of this

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance: Patterson, Annabel. *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History* (1991); and Schuster, Joshua. *The Ecology of Modernism: American Environments and Avant-Garde Poetics* (2015).

strand of Kafka signifiers in Anglophone literature or perceived how they relate to issues of genre and incipient posthumanist urges in late modernism.<sup>4</sup>

The fable can be conceived as a hinge-point or frontier between modernism and postmodernism, a consequence of, as George Orwell writes, the “impossibility of any major literature until the world has taken itself to its new shape” (Orwell 112). This “unseasonable form” is allegorical (in the Benjaminian sense) rather than mythical, unofficial rather than official, prehistorical rather than historical (distinctions Walter Benjamin drives home in “Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death” and *The Arcades Project*), centrifugal rather than centripetal, gnomic and minor rather than epic. The fable does not present the traits of a modern “great narrative” but instead, in the words of Jean-Francois Lyotard, “leave[s] thought suffering for lack of finality,” a postmodern state of thought infected by melancholia and malaise (Lyotard 100). “The fable,” he continues, “is unaware of good and evil,” and Kafka, the major writer of fables in the 20th century, provokes thought instead of offering a didactic solution (100). In this way, he aligns himself with the more open-ended Aesopian tradition before the anachronistic imposition of moralistic promythiums and epimythiums (Gibbs xiv).

The fable was, and has been, conceived as a foil to centralizing or nationalistic myths. By the mid-1930s, British late modernists like W.H. Auden and Christopher Caudwell had grown suspicious of high modernists whom, in most cases, they once adored—W.B. Yeats and D.H. Lawrence, in particular, though Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Proust, and Stein were sometimes thrown into the mix—due either to their sometimes vociferous, sometimes implicit nationalistic, totalitarian, and mythological “ordering methods” and aesthetic systems (Eliot 178; “Psychology

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance: Lucht, Marc, and Donna Yarri *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings* (2012); and Geier, Ted. *Kafka's Nonhuman Form: Troubling the Boundaries of the Kafkaesque* (2018).

and Art To-day” 339; “The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats 390,” et al.). In the eyes of Auden and Caudwell, supposedly internationalist writers, like Joyce and Conrad, displayed a fascination with racial redefinition and coherence in their fiction or a passion for rejuvenating national languages and cultures (Lewis 3,8). Jed Esty illuminates the process by which late-career canonical high modernists, such as T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and E.M. Forster, redirected their aesthetic energies to articulations of monocultural “Anglocentrism,” “antidiasporic” stances, and nativist revivals and “retrenchments,” as the British empire contracted and decolonization was underway; the writers in this study expressed their “fatigue” with the state of art and culture not through “an anthropological turn,” but through a turn away from parochialism and towards a half-taboo and ostracized European writer (a German-speaking Jew)--along with what might be called a phylogenetic or zoological turn (Esty 1, 4, 108, 215) . The late modernist dialogue with, and antagonism to, earlier, stylistically ‘elitist’ modernisms often resulted in a new emphasis on repetition and estrangement, epitomized in the deracinated and nomadic beast fable. Benjamin and Adorno, for instance, contrast Kafka’s work with modernisms that strive to achieve aesthetic or ideological coherence, construing Kafka’s work as “matter-of-fact” fables that “shock” systems and “break...the spell of myth” (Benjamin 142; Adorno 283-284). Nationalism and even internationalism are subject to the “ordering methods” of mythic thinking while the cosmopolitanism expressed in the typical Kafkan fable seeks a way out of systems of aesthetic and geo-political control and ideologies of separateness and purification.

Mid-century writers located Kafka’s appeal in an exploration and critique of various categorical seams: geo-political, temporal, phylogenetic, ethical, and *generic*. The fable is somewhere in between a prose story and a prose poem, allegory and fantasy. Kafka’s fables



magnetized writers of fiction, poetry, and various hybrid forms (such as the story-essay). It's generally thought that "[the fable] tradition has largely gone fallow over the past two centuries, with the result that modern literary works foregrounding animal subjectivity usually tend to be marginalized as genre fiction: for instance children's literature" (Boehrer 2). But Kafka spurred a new era of serious experimentation in this genre. Post-modernist (rather than late modernist) fabulist literature, from Jorge Luis Borges's many flash fiction pieces, Philip Roth's *The Breast* (1972), Lydia Davis's "Kafka Cooks Dinner" (2003) and "The Transformation," Yoko Tawada's *Memoirs of a Polar Bear* (2014) and *The Bridegroom Was a Dog* (1998), to contemporary New Wave Fabulists and Weird writers like China Miéville in "Four Final Orpheuses" (2015) and Jeff VanderMeer in the "Introduction" to *The Weird* anthology (2011), among many others, continues to engage with or imitate Kafka's fables and talk about his influence at length. Tracing this genealogy back to the initial moment of impact in English (and not entirely forgetting the French which overlaps with it), will help us see how the creative reception of Kafka helped to establish some of the main parameters of cosmopolitan fabulism that continue to this day.

Mapping out this family tree will join together diverse figures, many of whom have never been mentioned in the same context. Chapter 1 will consider how Willa and Edwin Muir's translation decisions for Kafka's animal stories and fables subtly influenced imitative practices in a generation of writers--influencing even their own creative forays into Kafkaian fabulism. Chapter 2 will examine a Kafkaian pastiche by W.H. Auden, along with multiple imitations by the Marxist critic Christopher Caudwell that have never seen the light of day--an unknown manuscript translation by Auden's lifelong partner Chester Kallman rounding out the chapter. Chapter 3 will document the inroads Kafka's fables made on the British surrealist scene,

especially in the works of Anna Kavan and William Sansom. Chapter 4 will turn to three Jewish American writers, Paul Goodman, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Saul Bellow, who marshaled Kafka's animal stories--his dogs, in particular--to reflect upon their cosmopolitan socio-cultural positions and critique traditions of dominion and mastery. Chapter 5 will trace generic seams and consider the fabulist impact on American poets like Delmore Schwartz, John Berryman, Elizabeth Bishop, and Sylvia Plath. Since the Kafka rage was a bona fide event in the late modernist period, it's important to showcase the width and breadth of its constituent parts. Accordingly, each chapter will highlight three or four associated writers and succinctly outline their engagements with Kafka's fables. We will dub this somewhat counterintuitive group the Late Modernist Fabulists.

## CHAPTER II

### Edwin and Willa Muir: Translation and Pastiche

#### I. The Novels and the Animal Stories: A Different Translation Approach

Few Anglophone mid-century writers could read German competently. Even those who had some command of the language professed their struggles with reading Kafka in the original. Samuel Beckett echoes the contemporary sentiment when he writes: “All I’ve read of [Kafka’s], apart from a few short texts, is about three-quarters of *The Castle*, and then in German, that is, losing a great deal...” (Beckett 464-465). In a 1932 letter Aldous Huxley writes to a friend that: “I have only read *The Castle* and some of the short stories in German. Can’t face *The Trial* in German, so am waiting for the translation” (Huxley 356). Paul Bowles elaborates on the same theme—of an initial bilingual engagement and then capitulation in the face of Kafka’s difficulty and a language barrier too substantial to overcome:

I loved [Kafka] even then, in translation. And then I tried to read him in German, but I didn’t really know enough to stay with it very long. Then I forgot what little German I had learned. I was never able to read anything in the original German. But I have read Kafka in English, again and again... (Bowles 47).

Paul Goodman, one of the main subjects of this study, adds to this trend in his book *Kafka’s Prayer*: “I have used the available translations; my own occasional renderings of the German are

rough and ready. Since I read German poorly, I have omitted all lines of argument that depend on diction, sound, and syntax” (Goodman xii). Encounters with Kafka in the original German often troubled or stymied the characteristic multilingual practices and predilections of modernist and late modernist writers. The majority of them relied heavily on the translations of Willa and Edwin Muir, two accomplished Scottish poets and novelists in their own right, who produced a steady diet of English translations over a twenty-year period. Many little magazines, such as *transition*, *The Partisan Review*, *The Quarterly Review*, and others, carried English versions of various stories, translated by a wide range of writers such as Eugene Jolas, founder of the transatlantic avant-garde periodical *transition*, and the art critic Clement Greenberg. These publications certainly contributed to the intense creative and critical interest in Kafka’s work, as will become clear later on in this chapter. But the Muirs’ translations got much wider circulation and were touted at the time by cultural darlings like W.H. Auden who, in his essay “The Wandering Jew,” notes that: “It is our singular good fortune that [Kafka] should have been turned into English by our best translator, Edwin Muir” (185). The history of imitation is inextricable from the history of translation. This point is important, although on a certain level it may seem obvious. Writers were forced to rely on available translations and couldn’t imitate styles or borrow techniques that had yet to be introduced into the English language. The fact that, for example, only one novel and only a very particular set of stories had been published in England in book-form by the mid-thirties (America didn’t receive its first native editions until 1937) had an impact on imitative practice, and is conspicuous when one encounters rewritings of Kafka, since they rely on the incomplete corpus presented, inevitably, in stages by the Muirs, according

to their own (and their publishers') tastes and priorities. Late modernists could think of Kafka as a contemporary because his books were coming out alongside their own.

The translations of Kafka's novels, stories, and aphorisms by Willa and Edwin Muir colored the critical and creative reception of Franz Kafka until very recently in Britain and America, when Mark Harman's and Michael Hofmann's translations of the novels and stories began to supersede them. It was an amazing run—the Muirs' translations were Anglophone readers' primary entryway to Kafka's fiction for seventy years or more. Edwin's forewords to *The Castle* (1930), *The Great Wall of China* (1933), *The Trial* (1935), *Amerika* (1938), and *In the Penal Colony* (1948), along with miscellaneous essays written over the course of twenty years, were decisive interpretative frameworks contributing—to the fascination and chagrin of countless critics—to the theological readings of Kafka's work, in which *The Castle* is figured as an allegory for the search for grace and *The Trial* is figured as an allegory for the inescapable and ever-tightening noose of original sin and divine justice. Edwin Muir's para-textual framings helped proliferate various theological readings of Kafka that were originally inaugurated by Max Brod, whose exegeses Muir adopted and extrapolated. Some critics of the 40s, such as Charles Neider, were skeptical of “[t]he chief advocates of the mystical school [Muir and Brod],” who viewed Kafka's *The Castle* and *The Trial*—and these two novels were almost always the exclusive focus of critical speculation—as “two manifested forms of the Godhead...justice and grace” (251). Neider, for one, refuses to apply a “simpleminded theological exegesis” to Kafka's work or even view his novels as radically new types of religious allegory in the tradition of Bunyan, as Muir did; but the overwhelming majority of critics accepted Muir's appraisal that “the two chief stories [*The Castle* and *The Trial*]” have at their “centre...the dogma of the

incommensurability of divine and human law...adopted from Kierkegaard” (“Franz Kafka” 55-6). Muir’s interpretations did differ subtly from Brod’s. He did not believe that Kafka’s “allegory” in the two novels contained exact correspondences, but was more flexible--in his words a “pushing forward of the mind into unknown places” (“Introduction” vii, ix). Brod, on the other hand, “speaks of religious belief as intellectual assent to a conceptual system,” supposing that, for instance, the Castle of Count Westwest represents Grace: “ist genau das, was die Theologen “Gnade” nennen” (Robertson 642). Aside from minor disputes about interpretive detail, however, the translations the Muirs produced for the two famous novels aligned with the general theological expositions posed by Max Brod.

But the Muirs’ approach to translating Kafka’s animal stories and fables was vastly different. Their stylistic and linguistic choices made them much more attractive to writers invested in ambiguity, in thinking outside politico-theological and phylogenetic frameworks and hierarchies. A comparison between the Muirs’ tendencies of selection in the novels and the fables will clarify this trend.

All the scholarly work examining Willa and Edwin Muir’s translation efforts, such as those by Robertson, Crick, Steiner, Harman, Woods, Coetzee, and O’Neill, concur that their translations articulate a Calvinist point of view that is only shakily undergirded by Kafka’s originals. Neither Brod nor Muir, Joyce Crick writes, “have a sense of Kafka’s skepticism” and hermeneutic “openness”; the language of the Muirs’ translations [in the novels] is, according to critics, “transparent” and abstract (Crick 163, 166, 168). Extending Brod’s efforts to present “Kafka’s works in a pure, clear, regionally unmarked style” (an editorial process Kafka himself always rigorously subjected his published works to), Willa and Edwin Muir, according to

conventional wisdom, produced a platonic and “universal” rather than “ethnic” Kafka, aiming, in the eyes of Damrosch, for “smooth surfaces and rhetorical eloquence,” which rendered Kafka’s work in “intellectually softened terms” (Damrosch 189, 202). Mark Harman argues that the first English translators “were often more interested in making their translations conform to traditional aesthetic criteria, e.g. elegance, vividness, smoothness of texture, than in the painstaking effort to echo the prose style of the original” (Harman 292). And Ozick echoes his remarks by calling the Muirs’ prose “dignified,” “unruffled by obvious idiosyncrasy,” with “cadences lean[ing] toward a formality tintured by a certain soulfulness...something like the voice of Somerset Maugham” (Ozick 54). J.M. Coetzee writes that “[i]nvariably the conception of Kafka as a religious writer influenced the choices the Muirs made as they translated his words” (“Kafka: Translators on Trial”). And Harman gives multiple examples of how the Muirs distorted the German of *The Castle* to comply with their religious reading of the novel—such as making the church tower in the opening chapter “symbolize...all too clearly the superiority of religious truth over the confusion of everyday life,” translating “mit klarerem Ausdruck als ihn der trübe Werktag hat” as “with...a clearer meaning than the humble muddle of everyday life,” rather than the more literal “a clearer expression than that of the dull workday”; the Muirs, he asserts, “spell out what is merely implicit in Kafka” (Harman 300-1). Michelle Woods’ emphasis on Willa Muir’s greater sway and authority over the translation process merely substitutes a search for God for an equally idealistic search for Love (Woods 73).

Interestingly, Kafka’s animal stories, fables, and parables were hardly ever included in the theological rubrics detailed in Edwin’s expository essays, and were thus relegated to the outskirts of the Kafka conversation in the scholarly discourse of the 30s and 40s, when questions

about (an often existentialist-inflected) faith and (an often existentialist-inflected) atheism were major talking points and obsessions of the cultural elite. Even Edwin Muir, who considered the animal stories in *The Great Wall of China* (1933) to be an “interpretative key to Kafka’s fiction,” discussed them rarely in his essays, which orbited tightly around the novels due to his assumption that these longer projects were “undoubtedly Kafka’s greatest works” (*GWC* xiv). Yet Edwin does address Kafka’s animal stories from time to time in his criticism. Whenever he mentions them, the anxiety about divine justice and grace is not front and center in his commentary; the crisis of belief still has firm footholds in Edwin’s estimates of Kafka’s aphorisms in “He” and “Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope, and the True Way,” but the animal stories constitute an aporia for Muir, existing in a liminal zone between the theological and secular or psychoanalytic spheres. They operate outside the dominant paradigms constructed by contemporaries and are therefore imagined as less important. This is an assumption that the majority of Kafka criticism has maintained to this day, although the landscape is starting to change. Edwin’s rare comments on what he terms the “stories, allegories, [and] fables” are revealing nonetheless. They show that despite his avowed preference for the novels, Kafka’s *Erzählungen*, and especially his *Tiergeschichten*, resonated with Muir’s aesthetic sensibilities and held a crucial place in his vision of the Kafkaesque—to a degree to which he himself might not have been entirely aware.

By interposing the animal stories and aphorisms of *The Great Wall of China* (1933) collection between *The Castle* (1930) and *The Trial* (1935), he hoped to give “a more clear and general notion of Kafka’s intentions as an artist and thinker” and a better picture of Kafka’s thematic multiplicity, the short stories being “more perfect in mood and more formally beautiful”



than Kafka's novels (*GWC* xiv). Edwin was moved by the fact that all the stories in this 1933 collection were written "during the last few years of [Kafka's] life," a constant refrain of the short introductory note to *The Great Wall* collection—these late stories somehow painting a more authentic picture of Kafka since he wrote them during a transitional and thus prophetic stage between illness and death (xvii). "Investigations of a Dog," "The Burrow," "The Giant Mole," and "The Great Wall of China" are described as "serene" and "enigmatical...as that of the plays attributed to Shakespeare's last period" (xiv). In them, Muir believes one can perceive that "the extreme tension of the conflict [of Kafka's life] is over, and that he can contemplate it now almost as a memory, or with the eyes of one who will soon be delivered from it" (xiii-xiv). The fact that Kafka's animal stories are linked to the end of Kafka's life is important for Muir. Edwin's own idiosyncratic notion of the fable in his autobiography *The Story and the Fable* (1940), in which humans and nonhumans come into close contact in eschatological dreams and visions, in which the ancient world and future world (often in the afterlife) fuse and hierarchies dissolve, informs his elegiac reading of Kafka's late stories. They are sites of unconscious experiment, linked to the discoveries, as Muir writes in his autobiography, of "Freud's and Jung's theories...the conception of the unconscious seem[ing] to throw light on every human problem and change its terms...transform[ing] the whole world of perception," allying fables to the unbridled creativity of dreams (*Autobiography* 157).

The conversation about Anglophone Kafka, and especially the Muirs' English renditions, is almost entirely "determined by the preponderance of the [three] novels" the pair translated in the 1930s (Crick 162). The only short stories to have been submitted to careful comparative translation research being the more heavily touted "The Metamorphosis" and "The Judgment."

To my knowledge, there is not a single comparative examination of the Muirs' translations of Kafka's short stories and fables, minus "The Metamorphosis" and "The Judgment," or an acknowledgment that, despite the Muirs' dominance of the Kafka translation scene in the 30s and 40s, there were many other translations circulating at the time in Britain and America. By looking at some of these, I hope to show that the Muirs were in fact well-attuned to the openness and the antinomianism of Kafka's animal stories and fables. Their translation approach to these 'minor' texts differs significantly from the admittedly theological bents of the two 'major' novels. This underlying iconoclasm would have given writers of the time an impression of alterity not present in the novel translations.

There is, as we will see in the next section, a distinct bifurcation between Edwin Muir's criticism and Edwin and Willa's creative projects that engage with Kafka's fables and hybrid assemblages—the latter jettisoning anthropocentrism and de-centering the drama of divine grace and justice, or at least distorting it to a highly eccentric theological position that isn't recognizable as the Calvinist system attributed to Muir. But there is also a bifurcation that has never been addressed in the fifteen or so studies of the husband and wife pair's translation practices. By turning away, for once, from Kafka's novels to examples of an array of short stories and fables translated during the 30s and 40s by others, in journals such as *Partisan Review*, *New Directions*, and *Quarterly Review of Literature*, and setting them beside the Muirs' translations, we can see how the husband and wife team, at least in Kafka's *Erzählungen*, are much more attuned to Kafka's skepticism. The theological perspective attributed to the two Scots blurs and deteriorates when contrasted to other translations of the time, showing the Muirs to be invested in acts estrangement, ambiguity, and the problem of the animal/human binary, especially

compared to the various contemporaries whose translations have been lost to critical consciousness and must be excavated from periodicals of the day.

This confirms an intuition Seamus Heaney expresses about Edwin's artistic predisposition when he writes: "Muir's Scottishness is best appreciated in the light of a much older alliance between Scotland and Europe...as a new permeability and capacity for absorption develop in their hitherto self-absorbed art and politics, Muir's simultaneous at-homeness and abroadness become exemplary" (Heaney 280). This openness and emphasis on estrangement burns bright in the pair's translations of the animal stories. A panning shot of some of the different decisions made by the Muirs and Clement Greenberg in their respective translations of „Josefine, die Sangerin oder Das Volk der Mause,“ together with Mimi Bartel's „Schakale und Araber,“ Sophie Prombaum's „Ein altes Blatt,“ and Rosa M. Beuscher and Kate Flores' „Ein Bericht fur eine Akademie,“ will serve to vindicate the Muirs from some of their alleged translation crimes and complicate their role in the history of Kafka reception. Patrick O'Neill's recent *Transforming Kafka: Translation Effects* (2014) is certainly the most detailed analysis of translation variants in Kafka scholarship, yet his small palette of texts—Kafka's three novels along with “The Metamorphosis” and “The Judgment”—leaves open vast tracts for exploration.

Clement Greenberg, an important mid-century art and literary critic for the *Partisan Review*, who is well-known for his celebration of abstract expressionism, was no stranger to Kafka's work. Among other things, he wrote an “Introduction” to “The Great Wall of China” (1946) and was one of the first American critics, along with Leslie Fiedler, to appreciate Kafka's many-sided and fraught Jewishness. In his eyes:

Kafka is the most Jewish of all modern writers...torn between the desire to act and to find a home and a safety really theirs, and the feelings that they are the objects of a history that runs along heedless of them and dangerous to them in what our Jewish bones feel... But it would be a serious and a vulgar error to confine Kafka's definition of the human plight to Jews, whose situation is but an intenser and more naked version of the general human situation. The more Jewish Kafka is, the more universally human he becomes. That is the paradox and—platitude—of great art (Greenberg 102-103).

Greenberg reads Kafka from multiple angles—as a politico-theological writer, desiring (perhaps a Zionist) home, skeptical yet conversant with the Halachic tradition, a product of his time (“a minority within a minority within a minority”) yet stubbornly resistant to “immediate, historical reality”—a secular and even “Chinese” writer striving “to achieve the anonymous objectivity of the business letter...a scientific report.” He is the ‘most Jewish’ yet also the least parochial of modern writers. This irresolvable collection of tensions can be glimpsed in Greenberg’s translation of „Josefine, die Sangerin oder Das Volk der Mause” for the May-June 1942 issue of *Partisan Review*; yet Greenberg’s take on the story is also more conservative than the Muirs’. The choice of English title itself is worth pausing over, since titles constitute a pivotal gateway to any text. Greenberg’s choice to render the title of Kafka’s (perhaps last) story as “Josephine, The Songstress or, The Mice Nation” (1942) is markedly different from the Muirs’ rendering: “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk.” The Muirs’ proneness to “translate into the word most closely related philologically” can be seen here by settling on the word “folk” rather than Greenberg’s choice of “nation” for the German *Volk* (people, nation, public, folk) (Crick 166). Throughout, the Muirs prefer the more cosmopolitan and indeterminate “people” to Greenberg’s politically-charged use of “nation,” especially given the fact that the U.S. had recently entered the war when Greenberg was working on his translation of Kafka’s text. The *Befehlshaberei*

(imperiousness) of Josephine is “dictatorial” in Greenberg’s version versus “dominat[ing]” in the Muirs’. Compare the following translations with the original:

...kein Einzelner könnte es, was in dieser Hinsicht das Volk als Ganzes zu tun imstande ist. Freilich, der Kraftunterschied zwischen dem Volk und dem Einzelnen ist so ungeheuer, es genügt, daß es den Schützling in die Wärme seiner Nähe zieht, und er ist beschützt genug. (Kafka 525)

...no single individual is capable of doing what the nation as a whole can in this respect. The difference between the powers of that nation and the powers of the individual is so enormous in fact, that it suffices for the nation to draw its protege into the warmth of its nearness in order to protect it. (Greenberg 218)

...no single individual could do what in this respect the people as a whole are capable of doing. To be sure, the difference in strength between the people and the individual is so enormous that it is enough for the nursling to be drawn into the warmth of their nearness and he is sufficiently protected. (Muir and Muir 365)

Greenberg’s version sounds vastly more topical, resonant of wartime geo-political rhetoric. The Muirs’ reads more neutrally. The preference for amorphousness, occlusion, and indeterminacy is much in keeping with the allegorical style that the Muirs’ stick to, tending to choose words that are vaguely multiple rather than easily categorizable; words like “folk” and “people” have much more open, egalitarian, and even archaic connotations in English; their choice to translate “der Kraftunterschied” as “difference in strength” casts Greenberg’s choices of “nation,” “difference between the powers”--not to mention “protege” rather than “nursling” (den Schützling)--as hierarchical, abstract, a series of rungs in a closed system that smacks of human social order as opposed to the vast leaderless diaspora that Kafka’s mice people are, in fact, a part of. The “people” can be anywhere, of course, while a “nation” must be somewhere, located in

geographic space and controlled with codes and borders. This is not to accuse Greenberg of jingoism, but simply demonstrates the consequences of interpretive and artistic decisions and how certain discourses feed into translation practices at particular times. The Zionist impulse and the universal impulse (that Greenberg signals in his “Introduction”) are in direct conflict in Greenberg’s translation, whereas the Muirs refrain from participating in ideologically or ethnically charged discourses.

Writers like Paul Goodman were not deaf to these connotations. In his study *Kafka’s Prayer*, which served as a launchpad for a series of imitations, Goodman construes “Josephine” as an aberration in the canon of Kafka’s animal stories. A major aspect of this negative evaluation has to do, doubtlessly, with the fact that Goodman, who wrote for *Partisan Review* in the early days before he was blacklisted by the editor Philip Rahv, hinged his evaluation on Greenberg’s subtly un-cosmopolitan translation choices. Goodman juxtaposes the freedom of the dogs in Kafka’s “Investigation of a Dog,” which was translated solely by the Muirs during the period, with “the too-fecund Mice Nation”:

All this is a sad thing for the dogs, and us doggish men. But on the other hand there is a happy trait of all dogs and some men: that they smile friendly at each other, exchange views, give mutual aid, run in circles about each other, wagging their tails, and sniff each other’s parts. This is beautiful and free: it seems to me better than the rather close huddling of the too-fecund Mice Nation, whose generations crowd too thick, nor is there enough food. The Mouse Singer is a representative singer: her music is consoling and patriotic. (Goodman 253-4)

Goodman recognizes very clearly the national and “patriotic” inflections of Greenberg’s translation (since the Muirs never use the term “Mice Nation,” Goodman is definitely referring to Greenberg’s version). Associating “dogs” and “doggish men,” Goodman positions the two

species as key representatives of Kafka's "agnostic" world, which is infinitely strange and benign yet under a blockade against "any ultimate answers" (Goodman 233). The Mice Nation lacks this sad beauty, since they "crowd too thick" and participate in the false consolation of "patriotic" music. Greenberg casts Josefine as both an artist, a wandering Jew, a naive fascist, and a corporeally-limited animal. As in his introductory essay to "The Great Wall of China," he accumulates political, historical, aesthetic, and theological points of view, underscoring their presence in Kafka's work yet refusing to decide on the primacy (or even the existence) of one interpretation over the other. Yet his translation is ideologically allusive in a way that the Muirs' isn't. Even Greenberg's choice to translate *Auserwählten* as "elect" has, ironically, a stronger Calvinist flavor than the Muirs' "chosen spirits," a decision that registers the redemptive language at the end of the story without using a term redolent of a particular religious tradition. This is not a picture of the Muirs we've seen before and isn't confined to Greenberg's translation alone.

Mimi Bartel's translation of „Schackale und Araber" ("Jackals and Arabs") in the 1942 edition of James Laughlin's *New Directions*, for instance, also includes theologically-charged language that the Muirs rule out. In her version, the Jackals believe the narrator from the North is their "savior," a word that has no equivalent in Kafka's original and is a dramatic interpolation by Bartel. The "oldest Jackal far and wide" in Kafka's story proclaims:

So wie du bist, haben unserer Alten den beschrieben, der es tun wird. (Kafka 282)

Just as you are, so our ancestors described him who would be our savior. (Bartel 410)

You are exactly the man whom our ancestors foretold as born to do it. (Muir and Muir 446)

Bartel opts for the much more literal “describe” (“beschrieben”) over “foretold,” but the choice of “savior,” as mentioned previously, frames her translation as more Judeo-Christian than resonant of a tradition of pagan soothsaying. There are additional examples of Judeo-Christian inflections in Bartel’s rendition. The Jackals desire “purity” (“Reinheit”); their scissors go wandering through the desert “until Judgment Day” (“ans Ende der Tage”); every European is to act as their “redeemer” (from “welcher ihnen berufen scheint”—another unambiguous interpretation and Judeo-Christian coloring on Bartel’s part). Quite contrary to this tendency, the Muirs fog up such theological lenses by describing the narrator more literally as “the man foretold to do it”; the Jackals desire “cleanliness”; the scissors go wandering “to the end of our days”; and every European “is just the man that Fate has chosen...” Bartel repeatedly chooses to have the oldest Jackal refer to the narrator from the North as “master” (“Herr” in German); the Muirs, on the other hand, opt for the word “Sir,” which is less hierarchical and less suggestive of ideas of human-animal dominion than a display of respect and good manners.

Other Muir translation choices reflect a trend in which Kafka’s animal stories are given cosmopolitan undertones, very much contrary to the choices of the couple’s contemporaries who seem to absorb, however unconsciously, the cultural and political divisions that were rife during the second world war. Sophie Prombaum (Wilkins) was an Austrian-born editor and translator who moved to New York City when she was twelve. She “pursued doctoral work at Columbia



University...with Lionel Trilling...[and] worked as an editor, primarily at Alfred A. Knopf" (Sophie Wilkins Papers). She corresponded with many well-known writers of the day, such as Saul Bellow, Babbette Deutsch, and John Updike, among others, and married the poet Karl Shapiro in 1985. Her translation of „Ein altes Blatt" ("An Old Manuscript") appeared directly after Edwin Muir's essay "Franz Kafka" in the 1940 collection of essays and translations *Franz Kafka Miscellany: Pre-Fascist Exile*. Her version is much less ambiguous than the Muirs, interpreting and translating this little fable—about voracious and inarticulate nomads invading a capital for mysterious reasons, never leaving, and devouring flesh alongside their carnivorous horses—as one of geopolitical anxiety while, very subtly, promulgating an ideology of naturalness that separates man from animal, self from other. In an "An Old Page," Prombaum does what the Muirs are typically said to do, translating, for instance, Kafka's "unseres Vaterlandes" as the quite literal "our Fatherland" (67). The Muirs, however, alight on the less patriotic and more neutral "our country." A few sentences later, "sehr weit von der Grenze" is translated by Prombaum as "so far from the border," giving a sense of hard national lines and barriers to population flow (67). Compare this to the Muir's preference for "a long way from the frontier," which carries connotations of mystery, distance, and ethnic intermixture. Prombaum's translation also reduces the creatureliness of the nomads, who "communicate with each other much as jackdaws do," by keeping faith with Kafka's own insistence on repetition. The fact that the nomads and the horses gobble up the meat ("Fleisch") of the butcher ("der Fleischer") at the same time is somewhat less grotesque in the original and in Prombaum's translation, less insistent on the anatomical complexity of the body being devoured. Kafka and Prombaum repeat "fleisch" or meat over and over, whereas the Muirs vary this pattern with "meat," "flesh,"

“joint,” “morsels,” “living flesh,” and “carcass” (68). The Muirs’ stress on the sheer excess of the culinary orgy taking place amongst the nomads and the horses demonstrates a fascination with the intimate violations of the body, construing the narrator’s situation as even more frightening and tragic. At the same time, the Muirs’ version amps up the interrogation of phylogenetic clichés by characterizing both the horses and the nomads as incontinently gluttonous and noting the complexity and heterogeneity of the ox’s body that is being devoured.

This can be observed to an even greater extent when juxtaposing the Muirs’ translation of „Ein Bericht für eine Akademie” (“A Report to an Academy”) with Rosa M. Beuscher and Kate Flores’ version of the text, which appeared in 1944-45 in Volume II of *Quarterly Review of Literature*, devoting an entire special issue to Franz Kafka “in recognition of [his] ever-increasing importance,” hoping to “open new perspectives” and showcasing “stories hitherto untranslated or unobtainable” (165). Not much information is available about Rosa M. Beuscher’s life, criticism, or translation efforts, but Kate Flores was a frequently-published critic and translator in the 30s and 40s who, along with her husband, Angel Flores (who coined the term “magical realism” in reference to Borges and Kafka), edited the highly popular volume *The Kafka Problem* (Leal 120). “A Report to an Academy” records the history of Rotpeter, an ape who is captured by Europeans and develops a desperate need to find “a way out” of captivity, eventually alighting on a method of imitating humans until he attains “the cultural level of an average European,” learning to speak and becoming a celebrity performer on the variety stages of the world. We meet him, as we often meet Kafka’s hybrid creatures--Odradek, Bucephalus, the Burrower, the Crossbreed, etc.--in the twilight of their careers or lives, at a stage in which they

are stranded on the margins of the nonhuman, human, and a state of thingness or nonentity—suspended between a forgotten past and an incalculable future.<sup>5</sup>

Once again in “A Report to an Academy,” we encounter a series of word choices that is at odds with the Muirs’ reputation as pseudo-theologians and shows their translations of the animal stories to be in line with—and even, at times, to exaggerate—Kafka’s love for phylogenetic play and combination. Beuscher and Flores translate Kafka’s “heiligen Natur” as “divine Nature,” while the Muirs opt for the more secular or pantheistic “Mother Nature” (*QLR* 189-98). The Scots couple’s translation-interpretation is anchored in metaphors of corporeality and creatureliness. From the opening paragraphs of the Muirs’ version, we see a metaphorical overlap between Rotpeter and other animals that is not present in the version in *QLR*. In harmony with Kafka’s original, the Muirs’ Rotpeter “gallops through [a space of time] at full speed” (“durchzugalloppieren”), yet the Muirs reinforce and magnify the creaturely metaphor by adding “at full speed” (*Ibid.*). Beuscher and Flores merely have Rotpeter “rush[ing] through it headlong”; the lesser-known translators also write that Rotpeter’s memories of apehood vanish as his “swift development proceeded,” rendering “vorwärts gepeitschten Entwicklung” much less imagistically and non-literally than the Muirs’ “spurred myself on in my forced career,” preserving Kafka’s violent horse-language (“gepeitschten” literally means “to lash”) (*Ibid.*; 282). It’s noteworthy that the Muirs continue this creaturely trend throughout their translation, with

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<sup>5</sup> Although Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy” was originally published in Martin Buber’s *Der Jude* and has been interpreted by multiple critics, such as Ritchie Robertson and Scott Spector, as a conceit about the unassimilable Jew and tacitly Zionist in its sympathies, Kafka’s flirtation with that movement was intermittent. Even Robertson admits that “from the outset [Kafka] always remained on the sidelines of the movement and shunned practical involvement with it”; Kafka includes both “Zionism” and “anti-Zionism” in a list of ideological and non-ideological activities that he could never commit to or come to terms with in his diary: “piano, violin, languages, Germanics, anti-Zionism, Zionism, Hebrew, gardening, carpentering, writing, marriage attempts, an apartment of my own.” Kafka, like Rotpeter, was always seeking “a way out.” See Robertson, Ritchie. *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature*, p. 141; Kafka, *Diaries*, p. 404.

Kafka's human characters as well as Rotpeter. Even more than Kafka, they strive to blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman, extending Kafka's thematic challenge concerning the two species' shared *Affennatur*. The Muirs inject phylogenetic ambiguity into their colorful descriptions and evocations of the deckhands who were the first men to interact with Rotpeter and teach him human gestures, habits, and customs. The Scots couple slightly distort Kafka's *Menschen* to mean "creatures," rather than Beuscher's and Flores' much more literal "people" to designate the shipmates. The sonic qualities Kafka bestows upon the men ("gefährlich klingenden aber nichts bedeutenden Husten" and "gurrten einander nur zu"—the former literally "a dangerous-sounding but insignificant cough" and the latter "to coo or murmur") are turned into the creaturely "gruff bark...that sounded dangerous but meant nothing" and "grunted to each other"; while the *QRL* translators give the men "an ominous-sounding but innocuous cough" and write that they "just mumbled to one another," eliminating this overlapping of species categories (286; *Ibid.*). The Muirs metaphorically blend apes with horses and men with creatures like dogs and apes, destabilizing phylogeny in Kafka's text even more than the original can support.

It's unknown whether the Muirs consciously bifurcated their translation practices, imagining Kafka's shorter fabulist narratives as much more exploratory and unattributable to theological frameworks. But this bifurcation does exist and bleeds into their own creative practices, too, which absorb and play with Kafka's strange assemblages and veer sharply from anthropocentric narratives like those of *The Castle*, *The Trial*, and *Amerika*. The Muirs' pastiches of Kafka's allegorical style and fabulist subject matter show their own openness to variety and distrust of systematic thinking embodied by Kafka's assemblages and alchemical dreamscapes—

embracing a kind of Keatsian “negative capability,” allowing themselves to remain in doubt, mystery, and half-knowledge “without irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats 277).

## II. Eschatological and Autobiographical Pastiche

In her autobiography *Belonging* (1968), Willa Muir details the couple’s vexed relationship to political commitment, in particular during the period in which they were translating *The Great Wall of China* in the early 30s. Edwin, in his own autobiography, reiterates the deep tensions between his early devotion to Nietzsche, his socialism, and later Christianity, while Willa speaks for both of them in a much more explicit manner. She notes their longstanding distrust of Scottish nationalism and the cultural and linguistic Renaissance expressed by the fiery Hugh MacDiarmid and others, due to Scotland’s lack of a “unifying center” (*Belonging* 192). For them, any political dogma, any unexamined ideological group-think, is fundamentally “inhuman” because it neglects inherent multiplicity, is too mechanically rational and doesn’t take into account the psychodynamics of the unconscious mind that subverts boundary-driven, categorical thinking. She writes:

We distrusted systems ending in -ism, especially political systems...Give an intellectual a dogma, said Edwin, and he would set up a system of political machinery that was inhuman...He was becoming finally certain that imaginative insights were best conveyed through personal, concrete situations like those invented in dreams or visions. (Here he was perhaps reinforced by his admiration for Kafka.) He went on writing his unfashionable poems, drawing largely on his visions...Translating Kafka, in his opinion, was a more meaningful occupation than political argument. But no one in St Andrews except ourselves had ever heard of or cared to hear of Kafka and no one knew what

Edwin was driving at in his way of life, or in his poetry. He began to wonder whether he knew himself what he was driving at, and that made him ultimately start taking notes for an autobiography in 1938 (*Belonging* 166-7, 192).

Willa tells us how Edwin shares the surrealist fascination with the machinery of the dream, as censors loosen and uncanny “inventions” (both familiar and unfamiliar) are churned out by means of the dream work. The “vision,” which blends prophecy and the fantastic, becomes one of the primary expressions of the Kafka-esque for Edwin. Translating Kafka turned out to be one of the major catalysts for Edwin Muir’s *The Story and the Fable* (1940), a visionary autobiography that doubles, at times, as a dream diary in the spirit of Swedenborg, which he began to write during a period of transition, during a spike in geopolitical turmoil which led to the Muirs’ translation work to dry up (no one wanted to German-language authors during the war) as well a series of personal crises that saw him shift from Nietzschean atheism to Christianity. Edwin notes that his writing career began after reading Nietzsche, and that, despite not being able to read German in the 1920s, he developed an “apprenticeship” relationship to Nietzsche, “imitating” him in the manner recommended by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (*Autobiography* 205-6). He produced a “pinchbeck Nietzschean prose” in his first book called *We Moderns: Enigmas and Guesses* (1920), with an introduction by H.L. Mencken that praised Muir’s Nietzschean energy of cultural and political iconoclasm (127). Muir intuitively gravitated towards German-language authors even before he could speak or read the language, helping give vent to the anger and isolation he felt about the politics, culture, and economy of Britain as he toiled away at a bottle factory with no escape on the horizon. Muir’s early fascination with Nietzsche, and particularly the ideas of the *Übermensch*, *Letzter Mensch*, and his emphasis on

the fundamental inextricability of human and animal bodies (and often the superiority of the latter, since man is deemed the “sick animal,” the animal broken by *ressentiment*). As Margot Norris argues of Kafka, Edwin shared “the conviction [of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud] that historical change, in nations, individuals, ideas, or species, is propelled by neither intellect nor imagination, but by physiological and psychological necessity” (Norris 72). In *We Moderns*, Edwin pillories the imaginative limitations of the realist tradition in fiction and dwells at length on the possibilities of a “new type” of man that is not straight-jacketed by tradition and is not drugged by the folly of anthropocentrism. As he writes at one stage: “Perhaps there is too much made of anthropomorphism. Man’s first gods were not “human” gods; they were stars, animals, plants and the like. It was not until he became an artist that he made gods after his own form: anthropomorphism is just an artistic convention!” (*We Moderns* 178). Muir calls for “something *more* than man,” and other than man, looking to both the ancient past of the species and the future of the species to shake up consciousness (179, 120). After Edwin’s conversion to Christianity, he “realized that [he] could not bear mankind as a swarming race of thinking animals,” a view he “associated with Nietzsche” (*Autobiography* 52). Yet he was haunted by this tension between man’s phylogenetic connection to animals and his spiritual separation from them throughout his life, and was never able to fully reconcile this problem, as attested in his autobiography.

When the Muirs began translating Kafka’s stories in the early 30s, Edwin was drawn to creaturely elements in Kafka’s prose. Much like the process of imitation, he found that translation takes “one close to a writer, closer probably than anything else” (*Letters* 32). His translation efforts sparked imitative practices, as he wrote to Stephen Spender in 1936: “I have

an idea for a story about the present state of things in Germany dealt with in the style of Kafka, with elaborate investigations and arguments. I think it is not a bad way of approaching the subject” (46). The elaborate investigation is a primary feature of Kafka’s late animal stories, in particular “Investigations of a Dog,” “The Giant Mole,” and “The Burrow,” all published in *The Great Wall* collection. Kafka’s investigative or research stories rarely end in a dramatic death, like Josef K.’s, but circle around a problem, such as the the source of the dog kingdom’s food or the existence of a legendary beast, a problem that is never solved but left in a state of suspension, the vying perspectives within each narrator offering multiple interpretations that never strike the truth. In this case, Edwin’s story did not materialize, but on multiple occasions, in both prose and poetry, he channeled Kafka’s allegorical style and fabulist subject matter in order to explore the seams between human and nonhuman, secular and sacred, and the conscious and unconscious mind. The typical picture of Muir as a Calvinist and theologically straightforward interpreter and translator of Kafka is complicated by his dream visions linking Kafka and the nonhuman in his autobiography and various poems, showing Muir to be sensitive to “Kafka as an undogmatic and exploratory” writer untethered to the drama of Grace (Robertson 643).

Micro-stories are littered throughout what Alfred Kazin terms Muir’s “unearthly memoir,” in the form of animal dreams, often explicitly linked to Kafka (Kazin 77). Minus a few poems, no one has ever written about the nearly omnipresent motif of the animal in Edwin’s nonfiction and poetry. Part of his justification for writing his autobiography in the first place is to explore his “unconscious life” which has direct access to the “fabulous....age which felt [a more profound] connexion between man and animals,” when “creatures went about like characters in a parable of beasts” (52). In the spirit of Freud and Jung, Edwin writes that “dreams and ancestral



memories speak a different language” and that he has “had many dreams about animals, domestic, wild, and legendary” which his psychoanalysts in London interpreted as him “suppress[ing] the animal in [himself]” (56). But he viewed these visions, later in life, as a direct route to the creaturely, to a poetic realm that is more authentic due to its anti-rational atavism, a source of inspiration and pain which brings mankind face to face with the guilt of its long history of eating, sacrificing, and abusing animals. Muir sympathizes with vegetarianism (Kafka, of course, was a vegetarian) but does not espouse it, strangely finding a confrontation with the guilt of animal violence an important gauntlet for poetic creation. His exploration of animals has both pragmatic and aesthetic purposes (as a polemic for animal rights and as an argument for the artistic potential of exploring the man-animal connection) as well as religious purposes. The animal, for him, carries millennial and eschatological import. A refrain in his autobiography is the verse in Isaiah in which “man and the beasts will live in friendship and the lion will lie down with the lamb”; elsewhere he writes that the “animal kingdom glorified and reconciled with mankind points simultaneously to man’s end” (Ibid.). Man’s end, such a politically and philosophically charged phrase for his age, points to an eccentric brand of posthumanism in Muir’s work, gesturing towards a time both beyond man and without man.

One example of such a fable in Edwin’s autobiography that is unambiguously informed by Kafka’s own fables can be seen in the following passage:

We were still translating from the German, mainly from Herman Broch and Franz Kafka. At one stage Kafka’s stories continued themselves in our dreams, unfolding into slow serpentine nightmares, immovably reasonable. They troubled us, but not as real dreams would have done, for they did not seem to come from our own minds but from a workshop at the periphery of consciousness busily turning out, for its own private

satisfaction, a succession of weird inventions...A friend of mine had written an enthusiastic review of a volume of my poems; a week or two later, having thought them over more carefully, he reviewed them again, coldly; then, after an interval, he reviewed them yet again, and had hardly a word to say for them. A vague apprehension that he might go on reviewing them forever, in a steady scale of depreciation, sometimes came into my mind, and one night I dreamt of him. He had turned into a frisky young colt, steaming with fire and mischief, kicking up his heels and galloping up and down the street before our door. At last he trotted in through the gate and rang the door-bell. I had been watching him from the window, and when I opened the door I was surprised to find that he had changed to his human shape again. Without saying a word he snatched a dagger from his pocket and struck at my breast. But the dagger did not go on; it was one of those trick daggers where the blade slides back through the sheath when the point touches anything. We looked at each other in surprise, not knowing what to say. Then he hurried away, throwing a cheerful "Good-morning" over his shoulder. A comic image of fanciful fear. (240)

Muir describes how the experience of translating Kafka's nightmares filtered into his and Willa's unconscious life, the dream work replicating and generating new permutations of the Kafkaesque. Edwin's pastiche integrates elements from different Kafka stories, in the manner of a pastiche collage, rather than engaging closely with one particular story as writers of the time often do; he reproduces Kafka's stylistic tics and constellations of motifs--nominal and geographical occlusion (i.e. we don't know who the friend is or where the narrative takes place geographically), anxious deliberations, the animal, metamorphosis, and sudden accesses of violence, Edwin's story begins like Kafka's "The Giant Mole," in which a businessman's research pamphlet on the existence of an elusive and preternaturally huge mole is reviewed negatively by pundits, exacerbating tensions between the narrator and the schoolmaster whose own pamphlet has been scathingly reviewed time and again and who accuses the narrator of malicious and even plagiaristic intentions. Muir's dream then morphs into a surrealist animal fable. The friend becomes a fiery colt similar to the "steam[ing]" horses in "The Country

Doctor” and Alexander the Great’s horse, Bucephalus, in “A New Advocate,” along with the horses that draw the speaker down from his window in “The Street Window.” In all the essays and books on Kafka’s animals, it’s never noted how the horse is Kafka’s most frequently-recurring animal, his ultimate figure for “departure,” for a way “out of here” (see “The Departure”), an *Ausweg* from the forms of cultural, spiritual, and political control that limit mankind. Often the line between man and horse turns porous in Kafka’s fiction, and a “horsem[a]n riding through the wide-open gate” in one story will suddenly vanish into thin air and seem to merge with the human rider (see “A Wish to be a Red Indian”). The violence, or the illusion of violence, at the end of Edwin’s dream--when his friend stabs him with a fake dagger--creates an epistemological jolt, occurring at a moment in which the man-animal boundary trembles intensely and making this passage read like one of Kafka’s own fables.

An unease about the limits of the human body occurs in other Kafkaesque dreams Muir records in *The Story and the Fable*. He writes at another point:

It was connected with a nightmare which I often had, in which my body seemed to swell to a great size and then slowly dwindle again...My nightmares probably come from an apprehension of the mere bulk of life, the feeling that the world is so tightly crammed with solid, bulging objects that there is not enough room for all of them: a nightmare feeling powerfully conveyed in the stories of Franz Kafka (59).

In his essay “Franz Kafka” (1940), Muir imagines Kafka in similar terms. Here we see a moment in which his criticism, translation, and creative writing interweave—the bifurcations we’ve been tracing collapsing at rare and important moments into a single practice. Muir writes in his essay that Kafka’s:

...thought throughout is subtle, but perfectly solid at the same time...this sense of oppressive solidity of every object, gives his stories their strange and sometimes frightening atmosphere. His world is a sort of underground world where the force of gravity and the weight and mass of every object are greater than in the world we know. It is a world in which life becomes denser, and where immaterial forces assume palpable shapes. (351)

In both the passage from his autobiography and his essay, Muir is relaying the language and crowded interior spaces of “The Metamorphosis,” which he and his wife translated in very similar terms. When Gregor Samsa first transforms into an *Ungeziefer*, he is confronted with the complex and treacherous terrain of his room. His transformed body becomes an impediment to his movements and desires; it becomes “slow” and “heavy.” During Gregor’s precarious gymnastics performance to get out of bed, Kafka (mediated through the Muirs) writes: “despite its breath and mass the bulk of his body at last slowly followed the movement of his head...” (CS 118). Muir also riffs on the last line of “The Imperial Message,” itself a fragment of the longer “The Great Wall of China,” in which the “imperial capital...the center of the world [is] crammed to bursting with its own sediment” (24). This cluster of phrases concentrated in such a tiny textual space operates as a Kafka “nightmare” in miniature. Things and objects are loaded with an extraterrestrial gravity, natural laws are broken, and “immaterial forces assume palpable shapes.” Humanist conceptions of the body, in which organic matter and human consciousness is cordoned off from inorganic matter and thingness, is debunked in a manner reminiscent of the science fiction genre.

The few critics to have examined Muir’s autobiography complain (as they do with Willa’s autobiography, *Belonging*) of its lack of references to Kafka and especially the lack of insight

into the husband and wife pair's translation practices. Patrick O'Neill writes that *The Story and the Fable* "contains only three or four passing references to Kafka" and Michelle Woods says little more, implying that there's no insight to be gained from it (O'Neill 17). But if we amplify Edwin's relationship to Kafka to more than one of a translator and see him rather as an artist whose translation efforts, critical commentary, and creative nonfiction share a blood-relation, a more interesting refraction process can be detected that isn't confined to his autobiography but also exists in his poetry, which we will turn to next. It is in the lesser-known, minor or peripheral corners of Muir's writing that we discover an interrogation of various generic and phylogenetic categories. By examining these moments, it becomes clear that other ideas about Kafka were operating, however naively, from the initial moment of his cultural impact. This helps to rewrite the history of Kafka reception, which relegates Kafka's fables to the outskirts of his oeuvre and literary consciousness.

Edwin's ode "To Franz Kafka" has generally been analyzed under the rubric of Calvinist election and "non-election," a fact that isn't surprising considering that the first eight lines of the sonnet refer to the "damned," "presumptive blest," "authentic ones," "shame," "ignominy of non-election," etc.—the very buzzwords Muir uses as interpretive mollifiers, helping to soften the blow of Kafka's strangeness and assist the reading public in understanding *The Castle* and *The Trial* in his various introductions and essays (CP 231). Yet when the speaker in Edwin's poem addresses Kafka more intimately ("dear Franz") the tone shifts and Muir engages with the motifs of Kafka's short stories:

But you, dear Franz, sad champion of the drab  
And half, would watch the tell-tale shames drift in  
(As if they were troves of treasure) not aloof,  
But with a famishing passion quick to grab  
Meaning, and read on all the leaves of sin  
Eternity's secret script, the saving proof. (231)

After Muir imagines a situation in the first eight lines in which souls are tested against the “authentic ones” on the day of judgment, along with the utter shame and confusion of potential non-election, Kafka appears as the “sad champion of the drab / and half,” possessing a “famishing passion” like the caged Hunger Artist. His passion is for those beings incomplete in their spiritual and moral development, those in the hybrid or suspended state of Kafka’s crossbreed (“halb Kätzchen, halb Lamm”) and Odradek—the word *halb* being one of the most frequently used to describe creatures like Rotpeter. “Halb” served as a hinge-word for the Muirs’ conception of Kafka’s interspecies drama (they employ the word four times in their translation of the last paragraph of Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy,” increasing the count in Kafka’s original). But it’s not only in this sonnet ode that Edwin’s poetic engagement with Kafka is inscribed.

As attested by his frequent employment of the sonnet form, Edwin’s approach to writing and art was a far cry from modernists like Somerset Maugham, as critics like Cynthia Ozick have claimed. Seamus Heaney notes that Edwin Muir’s “stand-off with modernity had preceded the general postwar dismay at human destructiveness”; and a large part of this standoff is in fact an extension of one strand of the late modernist project that valued repetition and recycling over stylistic and thematic originality (Heaney 278). Muir was a rhymer and devotee of John Keats

and Robert Browning while pushing traditional materials, such as Greek myth and Arthurian legend, into skeptical and hermetic territories à la Kafka. The figure of the stranger, both as war refugee, Jew, and animal were important to his poetic thinking. In “The Refugees,” Muir recognizes a cultural and demographic shift in the wartime years when “the Stranger [came],” bringing “the great and the little dooms” (*CP* 95-6). He elegizes the “homeless, / Nationless and nameless” populations that have become forerunners for a universal “homelessness” in the wake of massive wartime dislocation. Similarly, in “The Horses,” he imagines how “strange horses came”--another permutation of the refugee motif--returning after a long absence from “some wilderness of the broken world” (*Ibid.*). The human and nonhuman wanderers on uncertain and potentially endless roads (Edwin writes in one essay that “the image of a road comes to our minds when we think of [Kafka’s] stories”), whose mysterious trajectories and teleologies render defunct the boundaries of nation, race, and species (since all beings must pass together down these metaphorical roads despite artificial worldly divisions) proves to be one of Muir’s most consistent conceptual refrains. Muir stresses in multiple passages in his autobiography the “potency of the animal trope...in its fungibility, its potential placeholder for virtually any excluded other,” whether that be the wandering Jew, the sinner, or the refugee (Wasserman 77).

Seamus Heaney praises Muir’s animal ballads “of an utterly contemporary sort, frontier poems like...‘The Combat’ and ‘The Horses’ in which Muir’s simultaneous at-homeness and abroadness become exemplary” (Heaney 280). Michael Hamburger concurs that a “late poem like *The Combat* in *The Labyrinth* (1949), based on an early dream, is one of the closest approximations in poetry to Kafka’s world of absolute fiction...In comparison, even myth seems an impure form, too much tied to historical and local associations” (Hamburger 51). “The

Combat” is especially relevant to our discussion. In *Belonging*, Willa avers that Edwin wrote the poem “during a period of depression and despair in Czechoslovakia”—in Kafka’s home of Prague, in fact--not long after “the Communist putsch of 1948” (238). The poem, she writes, “steadied us both with its reminder that the armoured Killing beast could not kill humanity, humble and battered as that might be” (238-9). Edwin himself considered the poem to be “one of [his] best” (Knight 38). The few commentators on his poems’ connections to Kafka’s work, from Phillips to Knight, either consider a subset of Muir’s poems to share “the same spirit as Kafka’s novels” or dwell primarily on the “mysterious commingling of the spiritual and the concrete,” basically applying Muir’s own commentary on Kafka’s novels to the later poet’s shadowy, hermetic landscapes (Phillips 93; Knight 149). A poem like “The Combat,” so intimately involved with the Prague politics of the day, is indeed “a close approximation...to Kafka’s world,” but for reasons that have not been spelled out in criticism (Hamburger 51). The poem by no means constructs a positive or progressive political message. It is undoubtedly one of Muir’s most creaturely poems, since it is devoid of any human figures minus, in all likelihood, the narrator. To my mind, it’s a fusion of the apocalyptic chivalric dreamscape of Robert Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” and various Kafka animal stories like “The Burrow” and “A Little Fable,” in which humans are absent or mere observers. It also contains hybrid creatures evocative of “A Crossbreed” and “Cares of a Family Man.” The scene of ill-matched combat in Muir’s poem takes place in a geographically-blurred, hermetically-sealed space, within a “shabby patch / of clods and trampled turf” (179). A battle suddenly erupts between a vicious leopard-eagle-lion-bird hybrid, a predator “of all things bred,” and a small, clayey, amorphous creature “round” as “a battered bag” with two “small paws”—neither of the creatures



being “meant for human eyes” (Ibid.). This is a battle that rages for all time. Always, just as the hybrid “beast” gains the upper hand, and is on the cusp of administering “the death stroke,” the little bag-like creature “Writhe[s], whirl[s], huddle[s] into his den, / Safe somehow there,” where he recuperates before returning to the fight (Ibid.). The poem reads like a thought experiment in which the usurping “beast” from Kafka’s “The Burrow,” rising mysteriously from the depths of the earth (but never encountering the narrator due to the story’s incompleteness) actually meets the paranoid burrowing narrator with his “scratching paws” outside the burrow, the “hole into which one can creep and be safe...” and a bitter territorial contest ensues (Kafka 379, 367). Edwin’s poem concludes:

And now, while the trees stand watching, still  
The unequal battle rages there.  
The killing beast that cannot kill  
Swells and swells in his fury till  
You'd almost think it was despair. (*CP* 179)

Like the tales of the majority of Kafka’s hybrid creatures, violence and death darkens the horizon of the beast and his bag-like, burrowing foe, but they are locked in a cycle of eternal return in which no victory, no exit is posited. This is very much contrary to the simple-minded theological impulses attributed to Edwin or the straightforward political allegory that Willa imagined the poem to be. Even if the beast does represent the forces of political power and cruelty and the bag-like creature the counterforce of the people, the contest between the two sides is in a deadlock--the powerless may be fundamentally good, “brave,” and persevering, but this doesn’t absolve them from a struggle that has no millenarian or dialectical solution. Power may

“despair,” but there is no political or theological utopia to reward either party for their sacrifices. But it’s not imperative to read the poem as a system of anthropocentric correspondents. As Kafka writes in an aphorism Muir translated: “there is hope, but not for us.” In Muir’s “The Combat,” there isn’t necessarily hope for non-humans either.

Willa Muir’s equal contributions to the pair’s Kafka translations are just being recovered and reconsidered, thanks to Michelle Woods’ extensive archival research in *Kafka Translated: How Translators Have Shaped Our Reading of Kafka* (2013). Edwin Muir’s greater fame and status as a well-respected poet of the day (his books were foreworded by the likes of T.S. Eliot and H.L. Mencken), in addition to the elaborate interpretive frameworks offered in his own forewords and essays, overshadowed the fact that Willa—herself a novelist and accomplished classicist—contributed equally, if not more, to their “translation factory” (*Autobiography* 222). Later in life she despaired that her efforts were being forgotten by the literary world. She writes in her journal—contradicting public claims that their translation efforts were “divided in half” and entirely “egalitarian”—that “[m]ost of the translations, especially the Kafka, has been done by ME. Edwin only helped” (*Belonging* 150). In the end, it’s impossible to determine exactly who translated more of Kafka’s work, or who was the more important translator, as Michelle Woods spends much of her book trying to do. A more fruitful vantage point is to explore the ways they integrated and reimagined Kafka in their own creative projects, observing how practices of translation, criticism, and fiction and poetry writing merge, rather than reducing the couple’s exploration of Kafka to one of mere language-conversion. The minor or (supposedly) peripheral currents within Franz Kafka’s fiction prove to be the currents that arise in Willa’s fiction and poetry, too.

Two years after marrying, in 1921, Willa and Edwin moved to Prague, but, as Willa writes in her autobiography *Belonging*, they “never got even a hint that Kafka or his friends had ever existed in the city” (62). Subsequently they lived in Dresden, and then Austria, teaching, learning German, translating, and producing creative and critical work. By the end of their lives, the pair had produced around thirty volumes of translation from German, Kafka forming the bulk of their output, but others, such as the bestseller *Jud Süß* by Lion Feuchtwanger, helped to catalyze their careers as translators. But Kafka filtered into their imaginative lives in other ways, aside from translation. Very similar to Edwin, Willa’s own fictional and poetic rewritings of Kafka explore the seams between the conscious and unconscious mind, reality and fantasy, and the human and animal. In her autobiography, she only occasionally recounts their translation work, which she felt overshadowed the couple’s other creative efforts. The few who have written about the Muirs tend to lament the lack of time they spend detailing their translation practices in their respective autobiographies, whereas this omission is in fact compensated by subtler nods to Kafka.

Kafka’s work, Willa writes at one point in her autobiography, “seemed...to come clean out of the unconscious, perhaps directly from actual dreams”—and this Kafka-esque dreamworld comes into play in Willa Muir’s *Mrs Muttoe and the Top Story*, “a largely autobiographical novel...completed in 1940” but never published (Woods 65-7). Set in London in the 1930s, the novel follows a harried female translator, Alison Muttoe, who has to translate German writers (including a fictionalized Kafka) in order to support her unsuccessful poet-husband Dick (see Woods). The novel, which was never published, swerves, at times, from its realist subject matter about the difficulties of life as a woman in London, containing “two dream-like sequences...that

reflect and refract the realist preoccupation with women's work that are "Kafkaesque" (Woods 65-7). As one critic notes, these dreams are "an interesting footnote to [Willa] Muir's own feelings about working on Kafka whose *Great Wall of China* they were 'to get out at this time" (Ibid.; Christianson 146). A version of Kafka "appears in the novel under the name "Garta"...Garta [being] the name of Brod's fictionalized Kafka in his novel *The Kingdom of Love*). Willa writes:

Garta's work seemed to come straight out of the region which evoked dreams and nightmares. He showed an uncanny skill in describing the twists and turns of frustrated feelings; merely to read him was like having an anxiety dream by proxy. And every incident in his imaginary stories, almost every phrase, carried so many implications that the translation had to be done slowly, with extreme care. Yes, Garta is making me fanciful, decided Alison Muttoe, opening her jotter. I'm turning into a creature like the Princess in the fable, who couldn't sleep because of a single hard pea under a dozen mattresses. (Woods 67)

Woods ignores the ways fabulism filters into the creative work of those intimately involved in translating, reading, and channeling Kafka's innovations, focusing only on similarities between *The Castle* and *The Trial* and *Mrs Muttoe*, spending time analyzing "a bizarre web-like glassy fabric structure" that is hierarchical and sees the protagonist "thrust into [a] world of alternate and indecipherable boundaries, much like Josef K. in *The Trial* and K. in *The Castle*" (Ibid.). But in the above passage, the dream serves an unconscious space open to the uncanny, the creaturely, and the metamorphic—some of the leitmotifs of Kafka's animal stories. Overlaying her narrative with autobiographical elements, Willa imagines a version of herself translating a version of Kafka; and this intimate interaction generates a new set of imaginative possibilities. The narrator compares her situation to the fable of the princess and the pea, envisioning herself "turning into a

creature” that is susceptible to excessive anxiety and sensitivity. Metamorphosis in the tradition of Ovid and beyond stresses the correlation between dramatic emotional shifts, traumas, or breaks and physical transformation. Here Willa subtly reminds the reader of Gregor Samsa in “The Metamorphosis,” who “wakes from uneasy dreams” to find himself far from rhythms of the human sphere.

We witness an engagement with “The Metamorphosis” on a more explicit level during the time in the late forties in which she and Edwin were translating the *In the Penal Colony* (1948) collection which includes “The Metamorphosis”; “in February 1947,” she writes a poem “about the “metamorphosis” Edwin had to undergo” while working at the British Council in Prague:

Metamorphosis

My only love, daily I see you change,  
donning hard rows of buttons, buckled, braced  
brushed smooth and shaven till you are bare-faced  
and then disguised with large and horn-rimmed glasses,  
  
shod, scarved and spatted,  
gloved and behatted,  
lined with edged note-books for your students’ classes,—  
should I not find this frightening and strange? (Woods 55-6)

Willa subsumes the very language she and Edwin had used while translating “The Metamorphosis.” Gregor Samsa is also “hard” with “rows of legs”; at one point he “braced against a chair”; while his father’s livery coat has “two buttons” which are notoriously gold and “in a high state of polish” (130, 137, 154). Edwin in his “horn-rimmed glasses” becomes

comically reminiscent of a beetle. His outwardly-changed appearance becomes something “frightening and strange” to Willa since her husband embodies a disconcerting conglomeration of corporeal details straight out of Kafka’s animal story. Kafka seeps into her emotional life and helps her process a new phase in her marriage.

Autobiographical and imitative writing have a symbiotic relationship for Edwin and Willa Muir; textual engagements with “dear Franz”--both in terms of translation and creative rewriting--are inevitably intimate, an intricate weave of the self and other, since the two Scots spent so many years with Kafka’s words, changing them, adapting them, transmitting them as best they could. Kafka became part of their own life stories, his texts part of the texture of their conscious and unconscious experiences. The couple was close to Kafka’s inner circle in real life, too. They were friends with his last lover, Dora Dymant, who, “shortly before the war,” “arrived in London as a refugee”; Dora championed the Muirs as English translators of Kafka over some of Max Brod’s translator recommendations, and fielded questions from Edwin about Kafka’s religious beliefs--often not giving him “the answers he expected,” recalling how Edwin “worried at the question” of Kafka’s belief “to the end of his life” (Robertson 640; Crick 170). Kafka’s animal stories express the extreme side of Kafka’s skepticism, and it’s no wonder that Edwin, especially, backgrounded Kafka’s fables in his essays, which aimed at more finely-cut theological arguments and largely jettisoned Kafka’s possible lack of “belief.” Nevertheless, this tangle of the personal and the textual, the canonical and the minor, the theological and the secular, made Kafka a centerpiece of both these writers’ professional and private lives. The catalyst and driving force behind the Kafka rage in Anglo-American culture came from two

unlikely sources, two Scottish islanders shuttling between London and Europe. Creative rewriting--even if it took place behind the scenes and away from the public eye or in odd textual corners--was a constituent element of the rage from the very start. Kafka helped the Muirs escape the traps of overt political, religious, and aesthetic systematization and operate in a generative space that incorporated the practices of criticism, translation, and the production of multiple genres of creative writing.

## CHAPTER III

### The Zoological Marxisms of Caudwell and the Auden Group

#### I. Christopher Caudwell's Gothic and Zoological Marxisms

The rise of fascism in Europe came to its first bloody climax not in Germany, but in Spain in 1936. A large number of left-leaning English writers joined the fight against the Fascists during the Spanish Civil War. Among them were Christopher Caudwell, George Orwell, Wogan Philipps, Julian Bell, and W.H. Auden. Julian Bell, Virginia Woolf's nephew, was killed in the battle of Brunete when his ambulance was "hit by an insurgent bomb" (Woolf 148). Many other promising young Englishmen followed his fate. The polymath Christopher Caudwell (a pseudonym for Christopher St John Sprigg) was one of them. Exactly like Julian Bell, Caudwell died in Spain in 1937 aged 29. An ardent Marxist, Caudwell left London in 1936, intending, like Auden, Bell, and Philipps, to drive an ambulance. He was moved by the British Communist Party's call on "all able-bodied persons" to defend Madrid yet ended up becoming a soldier—eventually killed by a grenade (Dupac 14). While the self-educated Caudwell patented a type of automatic gear, published eight detective novels, two books on aviation, and was a prolific writer of poems and short stories, he is known to posterity primarily through his pioneering studies in



Marxist literary criticism, *Illusion and Reality* (1937) and *Studies in a Dying Culture* (1938). Auden and Spender carefully read the former book, Auden deeming *Illusion and Reality* “the most important book on poetry since the books of Dr. Richards”; subsequent critics, such as Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton, find Caudwell’s ambitious studies theoretically vague and overly Stalinist while nevertheless acknowledging the major part he played in the history of English Marxist aesthetics (Hynes 257; Williams 277; Eagleton 21). Yet his fiction, sadly, has received short shrift. In fact, only a few of his “Kafka stories” have been published in *Scenes and Actions: Unpublished Manuscripts*, while the majority—and indeed the most interesting—remain in manuscript. No one has deemed these papers significant enough to recover and analyze, but in the context of the Kafka event that we’re formulating, Caudwell rises into view as one of the most thoroughgoing and counterintuitive Kafka imitators in the 1930s.

In his notebooks, housed at the Harry Ransom Center, Caudwell speculates about writing in the “style of Kafka” (Caudwell Collection). Caudwell is fascinated with the stylistic techniques of repetition and borrowed or recycled language, both in terms of rhetorical clichés and also, quite literally, language borrowed from continental writers, such as Kafka--writers at odds with trends in English modernism (Whittier-Ferguson 11-12). In his letters, there is an emphasis on originality through unoriginality, originality through imitative experiment (reminiscent of some of T.S. Eliot’s essays). In 1934 Caudwell wrote to his friend Paul Beard: “I am now writing short stories, some in a vein inspired by Kafka, which I am finding particularly congenial” (Dupac 210; Pawling 177). Before sending the Beards the drafts of his “Kafka stories,” which were “at the moment down in the cellar fermenting,” he tells them that:

I am passionately addicted to elimination... The truth is I am reacting against the Hemingway-itis of long pseudo-realistic dialogues, and Joycitis of long pseudo-realistic streams of consciousness, in order to get down to the skeleton of the story... I like [my Kafka stories]. More perhaps for their originality than for anything else. Originality, at any rate, in English writing. (Caudwell Collection)<sup>6</sup>

Elimination pertains, in part, to the short story and animal fable, which was the shape that literary transmission took for Caudwell—the word “long” is doubly emphasized as something inimical to his purpose; elimination also brings to mind the irrelevance of much nominal, geographical, and historical information that Auden and Edward Upward, among others, viewed as antithetical to parabolic writing. Caudwell reacts against the various stylistic techniques of the high modernists and aims to get down to the story’s “skeleton,” what Hannah Arendt described a decade later as Kafka’s “blueprints of the existing world” (Arendt 104). His claims to “originality” link him to the modernist impulse to “make it new” (Pound’s slogan was, by the way, “itself a product of historical recycling”), to be “always on the lookout for what has never been” (North, “The Making of “Make It New”” and *Novelty: A History of the New*). Yet he admits that his stories offer originality only for “English writing” and that the building-blocks are trans-linguistic and continental. Instead of “borrow[ing] from authors remote in time” he borrows from an “alien language,” an experience that T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound recommend as “profitable” kind of “imitation”—yet a cosmopolitan World Literature writer rendered into English by two Scots is not, perhaps, what they meant (Eliot 143, 18-19).

The unpublished fiction of Caudwell troubles the claim that “[t]hrough the verse-drama of Spender, Isherwood, and Auden indicate at least a knowledge of Kafka, there is little evidence

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<sup>6</sup> Beard subsequently claimed that Kafka was “a rock that Caudwell felt he had to steer around.”

that anyone else on the Left took up Spender's recommendation of Kafka as "a *solution* of the main problems of realist writing that confront Marxist writers and their audience" (Croft 282). Caudwell, one of the most ardent English Marxists of the 30s, found in Kafka an at least temporary solution that he was not, perhaps, entirely conscious of. His approach is more in line with modernist perspectivism than might be seen at first glance, and the political unconscious of his mid-thirties fiction is more anarcho-communist than Stalinist, chiefly in its bitter antagonism towards state socialism and economic centralization. He repeatedly attacks the solipsism of individuals while at the same implying that there are no stable ethical or epistemological absolutes. In his Kafka stories, Caudwell shows the blind spots of ideological dogma which he did not fully acknowledge in his theoretical work, dialoguing with modernist aesthetics while at the same time employing a more "commonsense" style that probes and critiques structures of power and meaning. The "uncanny story," as he wrote in an introduction to the collection *Uncanny Stories* in 1936, provides an opportunity for the rational "materialist" to acknowledge the "chinks in his armour"; the "typically modern writer," he writes, must be "devoid of simple faith and also of completely honest doubt" since psychoanalysis has unveiled the abiding force of the irrational, "obsessions and archaic presences quite as weird and eerie as those of ghost stories" lurking beneath the conscious mind (xi-xii). His Kafka stories demonstrate the chinks and alloys in his Marxist amor. They show him to be, like Breton and Benjamin, more of a "gothic Marxist" than the two or three critics who have written about his fiction have given him credit for—"gothic Marxism" being a term for Marxist modernists committed to anti-mimetic modes, fascinated by "uncanny landscapes," the "phantasmagorical," and "a culture's ghosts and phantasms" (Cohen 3, 11).

Caudwell coins stories with titles such as “First Investigations,” like Kafka’s “Investigations of a Dog,” and devises plot summaries focusing on metamorphoses, like “woman describes gradual transformation of husband into werewolf” (Caudwell Collection). He considers cutting new generic cloth with a series of “Kafka plays,” a project that never saw the light of day (although the ideas were most likely syphoned into his Kafka-like short story “The Play”). One of his plot ideas “concentrate[s] on business with Kafka symbolism” and ends in a suicide like Georg Bendemann’s in “The Judgment,” while another carries the same title as Kafka’s “Prometheus” (Caudwell Collection). Elizabeth Beard, Paul’s wife and Caudwell’s subtler evaluator, criticizes his “Kafka stories” because they are “too wrapped up” and stray from Kafka’s “subtle...manner,” relying too much on scientific discourse “rather than...a meeting between science...& the psyche” (Ibid.). Paul agreed, writing that he “got stuck in them” and that “the essence of [Kafka’s] method is to achieve...discovery” instead of “criticism and satire” (Ibid.). Caudwell was a bit dampened by the Beards’ agreement “about the badness of [his] Kafka stories” but admitted that he realized this unconsciously, “feeling that [he] had got out of [the form] all I could”(Ibid.). Nevertheless, he maintains that the stories have “a certain stylistic and metaphysical interest, and I propose to publish them sometime” (Ibid.). This collection, called *The Island*, was “in the hands of Caudwell’s literary agents” in late 1935 before he embarked for Spain but never materialized in print (Dupac 26).

Some of the story titles in *The Island* can give a good sense of Caudwell’s Kafkan/fabulist source material: “Speculations of a Caterpillar,” “The Emperor,” “The Whales,” “The Nature of the Bacterial World,” “The Gods,” “The Judge,” “The Man’s Nest,” and “Philosophy of an Apple” (Caudwell Collection). Caudwell demonstrates a detailed knowledge of the short

stories and fables in *The Great Wall of China*, which inform his pieces to a greater extent than Kafka's novels (though both groups of texts operate in Caudwell's fiction). Immediately the investigative essayistic style of "Investigations of a Dog," "The Great Wall of China," and "The Giant Mole" is cued, along with the hazy bureaucratic world-view of the *The Trial* and *The Castle* when, for example, the narrator of "The Bank" professes in the story's first line: "I had known of the existence of the Bank for many years before I made any careful enquiry of it" (Ibid.). The "enquiry" is one of Kafka's favorite words and stylistic tools. An inquiry into an entity or institution whose "existence" is uncertain or unstable is a pet device that pervades *The Great Wall* (one need only think of the Giant Mole, the Emperor of China, the Burrower's beast, etc.). The rules and motives that direct the bank's actions in Caudwell's story are similarly "incomprehensible" or inexplicable, words that signal epistemological dead-ends surrounding the incidents of Kafka's Giant Mole, dancing dogs, and the Burrower's legendary beast, along with the Court and the Castle.

Caudwell utilizes Kafka's techniques to explore the mystifications inherent in different social arrangements and ideologies and express a cosmopolitan skepticism and openness. In "The Emperor," the transcendent leader of Kafka's "The Great Wall of China" is transplanted and forced to scrape out a living typewriting due to his obsolete position in capitalist society. Even with this turn of events, the emperor maintains his hallowed spiritual authority despite his vampiric nature (one of his teeth, which the narrator obtains after his death, is "long and needle-like, as if that of a vampire") (Caudwell Collection). The Emperor's metaphorical function as a vampire, as a leech on social accord and health, evolves into a corporeal hybridity that reiterates Caudwell's critical stance towards absolute and arbitrary power and also renders the Emperor

archaic and legendary, categories that (in Kafka's world) demand critical analysis due to their ties to some form of lost and irretrievable authority (God, the Truth, the Law, etc.). Caudwell, characteristically, does not side with his protagonist and satirizes outmoded systems of religious and imperial power as well as contemporary economic regimes; yet he refuses to proffer a utopian solution to his narrative, as his fellow communist Rex Warner tended to do. There are too many points of intersection with "The Great Wall of China" to enumerate every one, but a conceptual and stylistic highlight reel might run: a preoccupation with the ritualistic exchanges between Emperor and messenger; a narrator who speaks alternately in the first person plural when assuming the voice of the people of a great Asiatic nation and in the first person singular when speaking about his own personal inquiries into the obscurities surrounding the figure of the Emperor; a fascination with vaguely threatening and supernatural races—in Caudwell's case "fish-tailed men of the Antarctic regions," demons and barbarians—and in Kafka's the "damned" northern tribes with jaws furnished with great pointed teeth" who set up menacing "encampments" (Caudwell Collection). Neither Emperor, the stories point out, should be compared to mere "mandarins" who lack the spiritual authority to bind generations together in their vast Empire. Rhythmic allusions come from other Kafka stories, too, showing Caudwell's depth of knowledge of the *Great Wall* collection. The city of Babel in Kafka's "The City Coat of Arms" is prophesied to "be destroyed by five successive blows from a gigantic fist" while Caudwell's demons "deflate abjectly at the violent hammering of a thrice-sacred gong" (*GWC* 247; Caudwell Collection).

Kafka's late style allows Caudwell the freedom to explore the social and spiritual ramifications of concepts from a number of different points of view without the exigency to

develop plot. Caudwell deconstructs narrow-minded individualism and oppressive power structures by introducing narrators and characters from diverse walks of life, with diverse allegiances and diverse creeds with no ideological solution, key, or touchstone provided by the narrators—from emperors, pistons, and gods to “thinking bacteria.” Caudwell defies speciesism by bringing non-human narrators into the imaginative fold, such as whales, caterpillars, and apples, deconstructing creaturely categories and hierarchies as Kafka did before him, “exploring the consequences of evolutionary monism” (Robertson 36). The privilege and phylogenetic isolation attributed to the human species is deconstructed and parodied in stories such as “Man’s Nest,” in which “*Homo Sapiens*” lives in a “nest” and is examined through an alien objective-descriptive lens; the “species” is “not free from parasites”—whether nonhuman, human, or “machine” parasites—but rather “far exceeds that...in the communities of the smaller social terrestrial animals, e.g. bees, ants, and termites” (Caudwell Collection). Caudwell’s narrator wonders whether the parasitic nature of mankind (and especially the bourgeoisie), with its prosthetic machines (implicitly cars), “is a degenerative modification” or an “adaptation.” Caudwell intermingles discourses of species and class in order to question how “polymorphism within a species could produce a parasitic class with no function at all” since creatures such as “bees and drones cannot be regarded as a permanent parasitic class, since one at least is necessary to maintain the species” (Caudwell Collection). A science fictional twist occurs at the story’s end when the narrator discloses his Martian origin; the narrator’s estranged vantage point and fascination with the ecological mechanics of earth, and of the human species in particular, allows Caudwell to cast judgment on the parasitic varieties of humankind while ironically acknowledging the Martian’s own will to power, which implicates it in the class/species struggle.

The narrator confesses: “Our opinion, therefore...is that if we Martians were to domesticate *Homo Sapiens* var. *laborans*, it would be necessary in all cases to exterminate var. *Parasiticus* to obtain a healthy nest, but the other non-human parasites might be neglected as long as they showed no dangerous tendency towards undue multiplication....” The canny and penetrating Martian scientist proves itself to be an unreliable narrator replicating a eugenicist discourse of population management and control. Caudwell does not permit even his narrators to obtain the epistemological or ethical upperhand, always gesturing towards the “chinks in their armour.”

Caudwell presents his material through a series of questions and answers, fragments, cleavages, and circumlocutions—what Deleuze and Guattari call Kafka’s “discontinuities” or “broken form of writing” (Deleuze and Guattari 72). The rhetorical or unanswerable question becomes the staging ground for conceptual unsettlement, a statement about the ephemerality and incompleteness of knowledge. “Speculations of a Caterpillar” and “Philosophy of an Apple” adopt this style from “The Great Wall of China,” “The Burrow,” and “Investigations of a Dog.” Like the latter two pieces, Caudwell’s stories involve non-human entities solipsistic enough to believe they are the epicenter of creation (Kafka’s Dog asks: “For what is there actually except our own species?...All knowledge...is contained in the dog” and Caudwell’s caterpillar philosophizes: “Little worlds; the only stable things in a universe of flies, winds, birds, and beasts...finally we have the summit; ourselves...”) and meditate on the systems and habits that govern their lives. Like the Dog and the Burrower, the Caterpillar and Apple never acknowledge human existence; and like Kafka’s creatures, they obsess over fundamentals such as ‘edibility’. The stylistic mimicry is readily apparent when comparing the following passages:



And in this sentence is not everything contained? What has scientific inquiry, ever since our first fathers inaugurated it, of decisive importance to add to this? Mere details, mere details, and how uncertain they are: but this rule will remain as long as we are dogs...But in my opinion that is all; there is nothing else that is fundamental to be said on the question. In this opinion, moreover, I am at one with the vast majority of the dog community, and must firmly dissociate myself from all heretical views on this point. [from Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog"] (Muir and Muir)

Does this divine power inhere in the living race of caterpillars who, by sheer psychic power, call out of the void fresh caterpillars, making something out of nothing by their divine creative powers? Such is the opinion of the Old Believers. An early criticism was that it seems to involve the consequence that if, by any chance all the existing caterpillars were to choose the identical moment to uncreate themselves, no more caterpillars could be created out of nothing... Their chief opponents are the so-called Pneumatics and to-day their belief is gaining increased support because the new discoveries of science, which do not fit into the structure of Old Belief, are congruous with Pneumatic Doctrine. [from Caudwell's "Speculations of a Caterpillar"]

"Speculations of a Caterpillar" is largely a parody of religion, theological pseudo-logic and wild, neurotic exegeses concerning matters of "incarnation," "divinity," "redemption," "perfection and imperfection," "revelation," "ecstasy," etc. Abstract reasoning is driven to an extreme, becoming an exercise in question, answer, explanation, qualification, and rebuttal only to be undermined by a new cycle of questions. In "Investigations of a Dog," the fundamental question is "where does our food come from?" while the caterpillar's speculations can be distilled to 'where do we come from?' Both stories contain a mystical experience at their climax. In "Investigations," the narrator encounters a "beautiful" hound whose song 'separates and floats on the air in accordance with its own laws' (344). The caterpillar dreams about experiencing a "celestial vision" of "free-darting" divine spirits; the apple-narrator tells us at the end of "Philosophy of an Apple," moreover, how some apples "are seen to quit their station and be borne up... high in the air above the earth" (Caudwell Collection). Kafka's dog ascribes the vision to an error in

perception due to extreme fasting; nonetheless it proves to be a meaningful error in his old age. The caterpillar and the apple, in spite of their impartial, relativist broadmindedness vis-a-vis their races' beliefs, lack the dog's humorous self-criticism and therefore their visions are inflected with a naive absurdity that reveals Caudwell's more ruthless, satirical take on contemporary society's "illusions."

Caudwell's fiction presents a more eccentric Marxist picture than one might expect from his didactic criticism. Kafka's skeptical force is seductive for him; he mobilizes it in his own short stories while never quite resolving the tension between his critical and creative work or the very contradictions present within his theory, which oscillates between orthodox Marxism and romanticism. In the Soviet Union, Kafka's work wasn't translated until the sixties since he was seen as "remote to [their] realistic literary tradition" and spurned for his emphasis on misfits and lack of an "enthusiastic certainty of [ideological] victory" (Lunn 142). Caudwell takes a surgical knife to the anthropocentric blind spots of Marxist orthodoxy which tends to privilege human history and forgets that "there are cats, coral, and galaxies," other strange life forms like "earthworms and bacteria," showcasing a more inclusive brand of Marxist "thinking [that] becomes a weird openness rather than a cataloging and classifying" (Morton 25, 26, 34). Caudwell's miniature worlds in *The Island* are rhizomatic, paralleling, in certain respects, Jakob von Uexküll's perspectivist concept of the *Umwelt* (German for environment or surrounding-world)--which Giorgio Agamben glosses as non-hierarchical and constituting "an infinite variety of perceptual worlds that, though they are uncommunicating and reciprocally exclusive, are all equally perfect and linked together as if in a gigantic musical score" (Agamben 40). Kafka's anti-humanist elements allowed Caudwell to expand the parameters of his polemic to such a degree

that ignoring this unknown manuscript collection does a disservice to the alternative movements within the history of Kafka reception; such movements trouble the waters of the typical narrative of the Red Decade, a decade of supposedly orthodox ideologies and political enthusiasms crying for reconfigurations of (purely) human society.

## II. Rex Warner's Allegory: A Counterexample

The novelist and classicist Rex Warner was a college friend of W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender, and Cecil Day-Lewis, part of what Spender described as the “little group” who were “the successors to the literary tomorrow” (“Auden and His Poetry” 74; Firchow 74). Warner was the most infamous and widely discussed Kafka rewriter of the day and was touted by some critics as “the English Kafka” due to his politico-theological appropriations of *The Trial* and *The Castle*. In countless contemporary reviews of Warner's books, critics label him a “conscious imitator” of Kafka or something like it; by 1945 the pair were so often entangled that nearly half of the first issue of the journal *Focus One* was dedicated to a “Symposium on Kafka and Rex Warner.” In a 1975 interview, Auden, in response to a question about Rex Warner's place in Auden's thirties milieu and Warner's “Kafkaesque” characteristics, tells his interlocutor: “He was close to Kafka. I do not know if he was actually influenced by Kafka. You see, Kafka is another strange writer whose influence on someone else would be hard to establish” (Raichura and Singh 35). Isherwood, in a review of Warner's novel *The Professor* (1939), compares the novel to Kafka's “way of writing” which confronts us with “the nightmare

world of the dictators” (Croft 281). Warner himself discusses Kafka in essays and radio talks for the BBC in the late 40s. Among other things, Warner plugs the “beautiful translations” by Willa and Edwin Muir and disparages other translation efforts (in particular, the first volume of the 1948 English translation of Kafka’s diaries by Joseph Kresh; the second volume was translated in 1948 by Martin Greenberg with the cooperation of Hannah Arendt); he stresses the importance of Kafka’s “style,” “allegorical technique,” and “universal significance”; he compares the figure of the exile—and particularly the “Jew living in central Europe”—to the “misunderstood” or “displaced person” that pervades the “art of Charlie Chaplin”; and addresses the problem of political and corporeal insecurity in the wake of the “rootlessness” caused by WWII (*Personal Impressions* 21-26).

Elsewhere, Warner writes: “I certainly came across Kafka first in the Muir translation (I can’t read German anyway)...Indeed Edwin Muir once wrote to me to say that to him my work seemed, while using some of the methods of Kafka, to be directed in a quite different direction, being rather extravert than introvert” (Neumeyer 634). The British authority on Kafka’s prose compliments Warner by placing him in Kafka’s lineage while insisting on Warner’s highly political and socially-calibrated “swerve” from his model. The frustrated heroic quest, which Auden claims to be the primary structuring principle of Kafka’s “three big novels,” magnetized Rex Warner (“The Wandering Jew” 185). Unlike Auden, however, (who preferred Kafka’s fables and parables), Warner found *The Trial* and *The Castle* more conducive to his creative predilections and goals. Warner regarded these novels “as having given allegorical expression to the pervasive sense of guilt which, known to us or unknown, marks the modern man in a world of war and insecurity, believing in his individuality, but all the time at the mercy of abstract

forces, economic, political or psychological” (Reeve 16). In a climate of total war, genocide, communist enthusiasm and defection, and psychoanalytical disillusionment, the allegory registers severe ruptures and upheavals in the life of modern man, anticipating more recent claims by Stephen Greenblatt that “one discovers that allegory arises in periods of loss, periods in which a once powerful theological, political, or familial authority is threatened with effacement” (Greenblatt viii).

Yet Warner’s sense of allegory contrasts with the fable genre we’ve been examining and formulating thus far, since it is less aligned with the Benjaminian ruin, with insurmountable gaps of meaning, than with a desire for organic, utopian resolution in the tradition of romance. Warner was keenly aware of the potential criticisms of allegorical writing during a time of emergency. The “commonsense approach” epitomized in the fiction of Isherwood and poetry of Auden spurs Warner to employ “the form of a fable for commonsense, practical ends” (Symons 254; Neumeyer 634). A resonant communistic and anti-fascist/capitalistic plea wedged into a phantasmagoric plot was one of the ways Warner tried to make his fiction relevant and defend it from charges of unoriginality. Warner’s case, however, is complicated, as will become clear in a short discussion of his novel *The Wild Goose Chase* (1937). Warner combines the frustration and skepticism of Kafka’s “modern” allegories with the more millenarian teleological quests of older allegories such as *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Faerie Queene*—books he was devoted to. Despite his deep investments in Kafka’s texts, he endeavors, in his own writing, to dispel some of their inconclusive “fog” (*The Cult of Power* 107, 116, 119). *The Wild Goose Chase* thoroughly imitates Kafka’s epic novels while rejecting and revising Kafka’s overall lack of a “political faith” (*Personal Impressions* 23). The theological inflections (heightened by the Muirs’

translations and Edwin's forewords and essays) of the novels made them malleable to new ideological purposes. Kafka's animal stories were too suffused with skepticism about the humanist project to appeal to writers imagining perfect iterations of human social order. And unlike Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Kafka's beast fables have no direct socio-political correspondents (the Russian Revolution, Stalin, Trotsky, etc.).

Dubbed "the most remarkable left novel of this generation" and "a Marxist fairy tale," *The Wild Goose Chase* seems, at first glance, to accord with Muir's opinion that Warner's work runs "in quite a different direction" than Kafka's when presented through synopsis. The novel concerns three brothers who embark from an anonymous English village (much like the one in Auden and Isherwood's *The Dog Beneath the Skin*) in search of their father—the eponymous Wild Goose. Taking cues from folk tale archetypes, the first brother is strong, the second wise, and the third—the successful protagonist of the novel, George (also, incidentally, the name given by the parishioners to the Dog in the Auden-Isherwood play, a name that "seemed to embody solid Englishness for leftists")—is simple and honest (Hoskins 132). His journey to the frontier brings him into contact with diverse social arrangements and introduces him to a gamut of political positions—from tyrannical aristocrats and hypocritical bourgeois intellectuals to fascist thugs. The goal of the quest, the Wild Goose, which is housed in the glass-domed "Anserium" of the central, unnamed City, proves to be only a stuffed replica, a kind of false deity representing an ossified authoritarian government. Eventually George becomes the leader of a revolutionary force that overthrows the king of the City and exhorts the working-class masses to jettison ideas of liberal freedom in favor of 'leading and serving others'. In the novel's climactic scene, after George addresses his victorious "Comrades" about the new Communist civilization at hand and

cries “Long live the Revolution!” the entire structure of the Anserium explodes, “dissipat[ing] in the upper air like grain” and releasing a flock of birds “with wings wider than playing-fields” (*WGC* 440-441). Watching the birds, George dwells on an auspicious future in which the Cause will spread to remote corners of the earth. A few years later Warner would become disillusioned with “the Marxist scientific myth,” like other members of the Auden group and the New York intellectuals, but in 1937 commitment suffuses his fiction (Hoskins 131). This separates the novel quite dramatically from Caudwell’s open-ended fables and the various iterations of Auden and Isherwood’s *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, which operates as left-wing propaganda in some versions, while in others it is ideologically fragmented. In the 30s and early 40s, Warner acts as an apostle for a new monoculture, a “reconsolidated” society that is the antithesis of cosmopolitanism, placing him in strange company politically and aesthetically--with the aging high modernists that he was seemingly reacting against (Esty 216).

Multiple critics dismiss Kafka’s impact on Warner’s first novel because they forget that Willa and Edwin Muirs’ translation was first published by Victor Gollancz in 1935, instead of in 1937 by the more established Alfred Knopf. It is impossible that Warner had not read *The Trial* before composing *The Wild Goose Chase*, since some chapters are imitations of it through and through (Reeve 17). Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen, in particular, transform the courtroom scene in *The Trial* (the second half of Chapter Two called “First Interrogation”) and draw from the novel’s basic premise of guiltless arrest and trial in which the outcome is, as Kafka’s usher says, “a foregone conclusion.” Chapter Fifteen was published independently as a short story titled “The Football Match” in *New Writing* in 1936, along with Auden’s “Alfred” in the “Three Fables” section, predating *Wild Goose*’s publication. “The Football Match” functions as a perfect

example of stylistic and thematic imitation in the short story or novel excerpt format. It concludes on a note of Kafka-like solitude, defeat, despair, and possible death, as we leave George in the throes of suffocation, “having wasted crying” (216). In the context of the novel, however, it works as an ephemeral stage of political defeat on the way to a “rebalancing and demystification” in future times (Reeve 41, 17).

The “First Interrogation” chapter of *The Trial* is constructed on a game that K. cannot win, in which he attempts to convince the “spectators” of his innocence, who are divided into two “factions” or “parties” of “Right and Left.” These supposedly neutral forces turn out to be “corrupt agents” in disguise that “belong to the Court,” like the priest in the novel’s penultimate chapter. K., who desires nothing more than to be “fairly examined,” orates upon the corruption of the great “organization” with its vast hierarchies of “corrupt warders, oafish Inspectors... Examining Magistrates,” “police,” and “hangmen.” Chapter 15 of *The Wild Goose Chase* begins with a revelation that a clergyman, Reverend Hamlet, is “one of the Chief Constables” and that a character—as in *The Trial*’s first sentence the reader learns that “Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K...”—has been “telling stories, probably exaggerated, of [George’s] connection...with the revolutionary movement in [his] country” (201). In an environment populated with students, police, and corrupt Officers—an entire hierarchy of what both Kafka and Warner call ‘subordinate and superior officials’ and which Joseph K. and George “know nothing” of—George is forced to referee a game of rugby whose outcome is predetermined by the Government. Like K., he does his best to shake up the system and enforce “fair play” between the two teams, the Pros and the Cons (208).



The rugby field's arc lamps "glare" in a strange "thick atmosphere" of "rank...perfume and...tobacco" while the courtroom in *The Trial* has a "fuggy atmosphere" that "reek[s]" amid "a whitish dazzle of fog" (441). At a pivotal moment in the match, when it looks as if George has succeeded in foiling the Cons' predetermined victory—notwithstanding a police officer's assassination of the Pros' captain—George suddenly laughs, triggering a shift from an absurdist to a fantastic register. The goal posts suddenly "recede" and George can "not see the ends of the crowded stands." Similarly, Joseph K. cannot "see...the people at the other end" of courtroom gallery. Both protagonists, after doing their best in the name of fairness, are overwhelmed by a sinister "crowd." K. "pushe[s] his way to the door and escapes" but George is not so lucky, "struggling towards the exits" only to be buried in a mountain of flying cushions (Warner's greater levity is apparent here) (209).

In Chapter Sixteen, we find that George has been imprisoned. A police officer informs George that his "case" is "serious" (just as K.'s is); and after George insists that he does not have "the least idea why [he] is being tried...and [he] has nothing to confess," the clergyman assumes the character of *The Trial's* Examining Magistrate and informs George that his "obduracy" has ruined his chances of acquittal—thus rounding out the pastiche of Kafka's "First Interrogation" chapter (211, 213). As a stand-alone short story, as it is in Lehmann's *New Writing*, the imitative texture is rich in terms of both form and content; but the novel's narrative arc takes a u-turn, sending it in the "anti-Kafka" direction that Warner's friend Edward Upward preferred in his *Journey to the Border* (1938)—which, Upward argued, was "influenced" by Kafka's *The Castle* in terms of certain techniques but whose "message...is...[s]top being fantastic, stop being like

Kafka's K., stop searching about within your soul for a solution by means of action in the external world!" (Neumeyer 636).

Warner was just as fascinated by classical myth as medieval and modern allegory and unlike Auden, Isherwood, and Christopher Caudwell, deploys the more traditional didactic element of allegory to write a 'history of the future', what Michael Tratner, in *Modernism and Mass Politics*, defines as a variant of mythic thinking—"theories of the social forces and currents moving the world that predict that a certain movement will triumph" (33, 37). In this sense, Warner is closer to the classical legacy strain of paleo-modernist thinking, along with conservative figures like Pound and Wyndham Lewis. Kafka both infected and caused defections among pre-war fiction writers. Many Red Generation writers were swept away by Kafka while remaining suspicious of his ideological foundations. One French Communist journal, for example, printed an article in 1946 asking: "Should we burn Kafka?" (Deleuze and Guattari 96). The mystery of whether Kafka was a progressive writer or on the side of the bourgeoisie, nihilists, "nobles," or fascists dogged many Marxist writers who saw his detached and enigmatic universalism as a sign of newness and change while feeling anxious about his lack of boldly-stated political affiliation (they only had the fiction to go by since the diaries were not published in English until the late 40s). Rex Warner solved the problem by refashioning Kafka in his own ideological image.

### III. The Humanimals of Auden, Isherwood, and Kallman

The pre-war cities, and London and New York in particular, were breeding grounds for Kafka enthusiasm. Along with Kafka's English translator Edwin Muir, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, and Stephen Spender were some of the earliest writers to publicly celebrate and analyze Kafka's texts. By 1935 Auden had certainly read *The Great Wall of China*, since, in an essay titled "The Good Life," he quotes by heart (and thus mangles) aphorism 3 from the section "Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope, and the True Way" in *The Great Wall*: "The chief sin....is impatience. Through impatience man lost Eden, and it is impatience that prevents him from regaining it" (Page 149; Mendelson 347). In 1939 and 1941, respectively, Isherwood and Auden spent time extolling the renditions of the "best translator" in the English language, Edwin Muir. Auden later asserted that "the influence of Kafka is almost entirely due to Edwin Muir's brilliant translations"—a bold statement that attributes Kafka's robust transmission at least as much to his translators as to the author himself and setting the stage for Willa and Edwin's rise, in the wake of Constance Garnett and C.K. Scott Moncrieff, as the most celebrated translators in the English language during the late modernist period (Firchow 248). At a later date in his career Auden would call Kafka "the greatest...master of the pure parable," but during the late 30s and early 40s Auden and Isherwood were just as interested in genre and style as Kafka's status as a representative of rootless cosmopolitan Jewishness, of an underground "democracy" of German artists, along with Rilke and Brecht, whose iconoclastic work gainsaid fascist and nationalist tendencies, and elevated German literature, in their minds, above the French in terms of its influence on the culture of the generation after the Francophile high modernists (*The Dyer's*

*Hand* 159; “German Literature in England” 254; *Isherwood on Writing* 239). Both Auden and Isherwood had spent considerable time in Weimar Berlin and developed a strong command of the language, evident in both their original and translated work. Isherwood’s experiences with prewar antisemitism (documented in *The Berlin Stories* and *Mr Norris Changes Trains*), along with Auden’s lifelong romantic-intellectual partnership with the American-Jewish poet Chester Kallman, his philosemitic fantasies about converting to Judaism, and move to America in 1939—the “anti-country” in the words of Isherwood that Auden saw as lacking “bonds of blood and nation,” where the inhabitants were rootless “pilgrim souls”—helped to shape Auden’s image of Kafka’s peculiar brand of fabulism in *The Great Wall of China*, which he always considered to contain Kafka’s “finest work...all of it written during the last six years of his life” (Wasley 51; Mendelson “Auden and God”). Curiously, no in-depth essay, more than a digression or footnote, has ever been written on the important connection between Auden and Kafka. Filling in such a scholarly gap will allow us to understand more clearly a fascinating few years in Auden’s career, in which his engagement with Kafka registers the shifting tides of his aesthetic, political, and religious commitments—a time in which, however briefly, the “humanimal” becomes an important (and critically unacknowledged) vehicle for Auden’s poetics.

In the 1930s, Auden viewed himself, unlike the “realist” Isherwood, as a “parabolic writer” (*Plays* 555). His theatrical collaborations with Isherwood directed the latter’s energies into this channel, despite Isherwood’s documentary predilections which Auden judged appropriate for film but not for drama, which should aim at “portraying types” and “the general and universal, not...the particular and local” (Nicholson 213; *The English Auden* 355; Blair 99). The pair manage to intertwine parabolic anti-realism and social critique in *The Dog Beneath the*

*Skin* (1935) and subsequent plays like *The Ascent of F6* (1936) and *On the Frontier* (1938).

Before we turn to Auden's wartime American poetry, it is important to start with perhaps the very first published appropriation of Kafka's fiction in English—clear as day in Auden and Isherwood's dramatic collaboration for the Group Theatre in London—titled *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935). As others have shown, Auden and Isherwood had a very complex intertextual relationship with other German-language writers such as Goethe, Rilke, and Brecht. Brecht in particular, with his politically-charged didacticism and playful mixture of high and low culture, proved to be a lifelong passion for Auden. He knew Brecht personally, translated some of his dramatic works with Chester Kallman, and collaborated with Brecht himself on various translations. Isherwood's honest avowal of the influence of Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper* (1928) and *Stadt Mahagonny* (1930) on their *Dogskin* should be expanded by his assertion, in 1939, about Kafka's centrality for Auden's aesthetics ("German Literature in England" 255). Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog" turns out to be one of the major sources on which the pair's play relies.

*Dogskin* constructs a half-imaginary but extremely topical Europe (the dictatorial, militaristic, anti-semitic, and "blood and soil" regime of the country called Westland is an unambiguous reference to Nazi Germany) whose state apparatuses and national boundaries are teetering on the brink of total war. The picaresque quest narrative involves the search for the missing Sir Francis Crewe, heir to Honeypot Hall, a manor in a prototypical and anonymous English village. The quest is undertaken by the unworldly protagonist, Alan Norman, and a mysterious, whiskey-drinking, dancing, and uncannily wise dog who turns out, after many misadventures across an imaginary Europe, to be Sir Francis in disguise. The dog-skin is both a disguise and an autonomous creature that has the power of speech when Sir Francis is not

clothed in it. In the climactic transformation scene, drawn from pantomime, Sir Francis throws off the dog-skin inside which he has been hiding and delivers an anti-fascist and anti-capitalist speech to his fellow citizens (Innes 86).

Despite appearances, the play is not, in one critic's words, "a bald [Marxist] allegory" (Beach 200). It is rather a modern, fragmented, enigmatic allegory expressed through what I've called an allegorical style and consisting of passages that are pointedly fabulist in content.<sup>7</sup> This is due, in part, to the many versions of the play's ending, remodeled again and again by Auden and Isherwood due to their uneasiness—unlike their friends Rex Warner and Edward Upward—with bald uncomplicated didacticism. The didactic moral would dominate the play if the original published version was left to stand. In this iteration, Francis tells his auditors that they "are units in an immense army" and leads them triumphantly off the stage into a utopian Communist future, presaging the ending of Rex Warner's *The Wild Goose Chase*; while the corrupt fascist characters metamorphose into "bestial and fantastic" goats, cats, turkeys, and bulls, in a scene anticipatory of Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) (*Plays* 582, 584, 553-597). But over time many other versions were generated. For *Dogskin*'s first stage production in 1936, the play was "completely rewritten"; the German-hating Mildred Luce stabs Francis to death while journalists "sew Francis up again into his dogskin" to conceal the crime and the play ends with a blithely ironic wedding scene. In 1947 Auden again "revised the concluding scene for a New York revival" and even "invited students in an English class [at Smith College in 1953] to rewrite the [final] scene, and awarded a prize to the version he judged best" (555, 566). The text was forever cast in a provisional state and never harmonizes with a consistent ideological stance,

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<sup>7</sup> See: Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, pp. 239, 271, 365, 894; and Muir, Edwin. "Introduction," pp. vii, ix (1930).

minus its general critique of bigotry, violence, and corrupt institutions. Indeed, like Kafka's "On Parables" and various Talmudic parables, in which one conceit devolves into an endless series of conceits and counter-conceits, Auden suggests that his Smith College students introduce "a 'great white cat' who will begin the search [for Francis Crewe] over again" (Ibid.).

And this brings us to Kafka in both a vague generic sense and a very concrete sense. Francis' speech, when he steps out of his dog-skin, mimics the legalistic and scientific discourse from Kafka's dog narrator in "Investigations of a Dog" and in multiple places overlaps with Kafka's words quite specifically. "Investigations of a Dog" is one of Kafka's "thought stories" (rather than one of his "dream stories") (Corngold 111). It was written near the end of Kafka's life and exemplifies his "late style," which is highly legalistic, midrashic, abstract, removed from empirical anchoring, and involving a narrator that Stanley Corngold defines as "absorbed in exquisitely refined research"; this style is structured by what he calls "chiastic recursion," in which syntactic patterns are continually "inverted" and final claims are forever "postponed" (Corngold 95; Corngold and Preece 104).

"Investigations" tells the story, in the first person, of the narrator-dog in the twilight of his life, reminiscing—much like the narrator of "The Burrow," also written in Kafka's final year—over his life's experiences and experiments, and especially his inquiries into the mysterious source of the dog kingdom's food. These researches cast the narrator as a misfit in the dog community, a community in which humans (seemingly) play no part or do not exist at all. Auden and Isherwood's dog does not lack a central "blind spot" (unawareness of humanity's existence) but rather is literally a kind of blind spot for Alan Norman and other characters who, until the play's conclusion, do not know the dog is Francis in disguise. When Francis steps out of the dog-

skin and delivers his anti-fascist speech, he says that, as a dog, had observed these ideologically lost souls with “a dog’s-eye view”—with “pseudo-scientific” interest that compelled him to “record what [they] were like” (285). Likewise, Kafka’s dog in “Investigations” views the world from a radically different angle and pursues “scientific investigations” for which he feels an “incapacity” but nevertheless records “observation[s]”; the aim of his investigations are more metaphysical than the politically-motivated Sir Francis, who seeks to enlighten characters about the shaky foundations of self-obsessed lives (76-7). Yet the play hinges on Kafka’s style at key moments involving the “dog” speaking. In the first transition from the satirical to the fantastic, the “dog-skin” sans Francis soliloquizes using a collage of phrases from Kafka’s dog-narrator. It begins:

It’s only me, the dog’s skin that hides that eccentric young man. I hope you admire my accent? I’ve lived so long with them, I have all the émigré’s pride at having forgotten my own... When I first paid them a visit, before I gave up my nationality and was still an Irish Wolfhound, I was very romantic. The odour of a particular arm chair, the touch of certain fingers, excited me to rash generalisations which I believed to be profound... My dearest ambition was to be accepted naturally as one of them. I was soon disillusioned! To them I was only a skin...(272-3)

Like the dog-skin, the narrator of “Investigations” begins his rumination by thinking back to former times when he was a more integrated part of his community yet felt an underlying sense of alienation; it’s hard not to detect a valence of the elegiac perspective of an acculturated Jew in both passages:

How much my life has changed, and yet how unchanged it has remained at bottom!  
When I think back and recall the time when I was still a member of the canine community, sharing in all its preoccupations, a dog among dogs, I find on closer



examination from the very beginning I sensed some discrepancy, some little maladjustment...(Muir and Muir)

“When I think back and recall the time when I was still a member of the canine community” is transformed by Auden and Isherwood to “When I first paid them a visit, before I gave up my nationality and was still an Irish Wolfhound.” The dogs’ experiences of alienation are inflected with faint nostalgia for a time when both were “still” part of a species or collective. Neither narrator has any “ambition to be peculiar,” as Kafka writes in a later passage in “Investigations,” but nonetheless long to be a member of a community which they are doomed and blessed to examine from the outside, in a perpetual state of suspension and mobility. The dog-skin’s “ambition to be accepted” similarly corresponds to the moment when Kafka’s dog fantasizes about the potential social fruits of his researches—how his species, in an ideal world, would incorporate his person and discoveries into their heart of hearts: “I would now be accepted with great honour, the long-yearned-for warmth of assembled canine bodies would lap me round...”(63). Critics regularly read such passages as indicative of Kafka’s Zionist sympathies—and it’s hard not to detect a hint of such nationalist longings in “Investigations”—but Kafka’s alternating avowals of Zionism and what he termed “Antizionismus,” his suspicion of idealistic communal ventures and easy fixes to incurable existential situations, is evident in the dog’s patently saccharine daydream (Robertson 141; Bruce 160-1).

The liminal space of the animal point of view in *Dogskin*, its cosmopolitan and ironic broadmindedness, its adopted “accent” of the acculturated émigré emanates from the creative space of “Investigations” and brings to mind Red Peter’s homelessness and hybridity as he “observes” human behavior from the outside in “Report to an Academy.” The integration of

seemingly incompatible elements of the social fabric was a fundamental element of Marxism and Auden and Isherwood, who ascribed to the movement in 1935, employ the dog-skin's scientific style to persuade the public of their bonds that defy nation and tradition; whereas Kafka's dog is far more skeptical about the outsider's eventual incorporation into the community. The youthful, epicurean outlook of Auden-Isherwood's dog "excited [him] to rash generalisations which [he] believed to be profound" until wider experience "disillusioned" him. Kafka's solitary "floating dogs" (*Lufthunde*)—as many critics have noted, a possible reference to the Yiddish word *Luftmensch*, or air people, "a metaphor which is normally applied to unfortunates who have no income and must rely on the community for support"—are "absorbed in what is supposed to be profound thought" but offer the narrator no insights or answers to the metaphysical questions he poses (Bruce 161). Mythic desire for racial or national wholeness is tenaciously undercut.

The all-too-human animal disrupts political mystifications with critical debate and objective observation. Yet as stated previously, the "message" in *Dog Beneath the Skin*, while always critical of capitalism, wavers due to its multiple conflicting endings (is Francis a martyr? Or a mere ineffectual idealist?). In some of them, the revolutionary Sir Francis dies and his message is suppressed; in others he proves victorious. On multiple levels this wavering anticipates Auden and Isherwood's "apostasy," away from the Marxist program and towards a more liberal democratic stance, roughly coinciding with their move to America in 1939 (Buell 1). In the play's diverse versions, the ideology reflects anarchist critique and institutional dismantlement rather than the utopian Marxism of Rex Warner and Edward Upward. The humanimal becomes the means through which distance or estrangement can be achieved, in a

manner not dissimilar to Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekt"--though achieved through different tropological means.

In the rest of the Auden-Isherwood plays there is little evidence of targeted recycling, despite the pair's abiding interest in geopolitical critique and ambiguous no-place settings. In terms of his individual work, Isherwood never integrates Kafka's texts again, whereas they manifests in subtle yet important ways in one of Auden's subsequent short sketches. The fable for cabaret "Alfred," occurring under the subsection "Three Fables" (along with Rex Warner's "The Football Match") in *New Writing* (1936), is very much in the Kafka vein. The sketch presents us with a "dowdy old woman" apostrophizing her beloved "magnificent white gander," Alfred, whom she treats as a husband, father, child, and enemy all at once (*Plays* 437). She "reminds us of certain prominent European figures" in her emotional volatility, arbitrary prejudices, and exertion of power (*Ibid.*). Before the curtain falls, the woman prepares to cut the goose's throat with a knife. This text is a collage-like pastiche of Kafka's "A Crossbreed," a fact that isn't obvious to the reader lacking an in-depth knowledge of Kafka's work. In Kafka's "A Crossbreed," the narrator tells us of a half-cat half-lamb hybrid that is an inheritance from his father and has no counterpart in the entire world. It is a creature fond of "skipping and slinking," that lies "beside the hen-coop" but never attacks and contentedly sits "on [the narrator's] knees" (*GWC* 238-9). Kafka's crossbreed has "the ambitions of a human" and towards the end of the story mutters a communication in the narrator's ear which cannot be understood but is weighted with secret meaning; both the narrator and the animal tacitly agree that "the knife of the butcher would be a release" for it due to its painful state of phylogenetic liminality and solitude. The fable ends with the animal 'waiting', "challenging [the narrator] to do the thing of which

both of [them] are thinking” (241). Auden’s “Alfred” opens with the woman lifting the “door of the coop” to call the gander Alfred to his meal. On multiple occasions she “whispers in Alfred’s ear,” warns him about a “tripping” fox “waiting his chance,” and the sketch concludes with Alfred in his “Auntie’s lap” while she “grasps Alfred firmly with the left hand and gets the knife ready in the right” (437-8). Both texts end on a note of suspension, with a violent act against the animal either in the near or far horizon.

Alfred the gander is less anthropomorphic than Kafka’s crossbreed and is therefore easier to situate within a symbolic framework, but both creatures unsettle the boundaries between human and nonhuman and raise (but don’t seek to answer) difficult questions about family, sacrifice, and mongrelism at a time of war and widespread eugenicist racial politics. Auden’s gander is a metaphorical cry against systems of classification and declassification, of the cruelty inherent in the domination and devaluation of one species or group by another; Kafka’s crossbreed, with its complex weave of phylogenetic traits, is a critique of the idea of categorization itself--the narrator’s unique familial ties to the creature creating an opportunity for self-reflection on his own alterity. But both humanimals provoke a sense of uncertainty and anxiety about idealistic narratives of humanistic values and historical progress in the face or wake of socio-cultural dissolution.

Kafka was important to Auden during a period of political and geographic transition. The humanimal became a central figure in his project of imaginative estrangement--estrangement from strict ideologies, stuffy and parochial (to his mind) English literary culture, and creative systems that he’d grown bored with. His fables of the late 30s express “an ethos of uncertainty, hesitation, and even wit that is sometimes at odds with political action and with interventionist

paradigms of critical theory” along with a “detachment from local cultures and the interests of the nation” (Walkowitz 13, 17). The cosmopolitan uncertainty and critique of taxonomic and boundary-driven thinking at the heart of Kafka’s fables infected Auden for a brief period between identities (as he transitioned from Communist to Christian), when he was keen on “opening [himself] up to a radical unlearning of all definitive modes of identification” (Schoene 21).

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To conclude our discussion of the Kafka effect on the Auden group, a jump to the future is germane, to the tail-end of the first phase of the Kafka rage. The Jewish-American poet Chester Kallman—Auden’s lifelong (although notoriously unfaithful) lover and partner from 1939 onwards when the couple met at a reading in New York—was an active and equal collaborator in many opera libretti and translations produced with Auden after 1947. Auden viewed himself as “something of a *déraciné*” and cultivated an active philo-Semitism enhanced by his queerness and resulting sense of ‘geographic mobility’; he was taken with Kallman’s Jewish upbringing and Yiddish flair and humor (Kallman’s “mother had been an actress in the Yiddish theater as a girl”) (Roberts 19; Jakobsen 19). Kallman, who was responsible for sparking Auden’s interest in the opera and, indirectly, for his continuing collaboration with Benjamin Britten in the operetta *Paul Bunyan* (1939 (which, as Auden writes in a brief essay on the operetta, ‘universalizes’ the American legend and obviates the ‘use’ of the “mythical figure”) (*Libretti* 569). Kallman first acted as original co-librettist for Igor Stravinsky’s opera *The Rake’s Progress* (begun in 1947), based on a series of allegorical paintings by William Hogarth

depicting the rise and fall in the fortunes of a wealthy London libertine. The verse-texts from which various choral scores were generated set the stage for “one of the most significant collaborative partnerships in modern opera—Auden and Kallman” (248). Along with translations of Brecht’s *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1958) and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1960), among others, the pair translated the opera libretto from the original German for a new adaptation of Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* (1955) and considered other German-translation projects (529). After their collaboration began, Auden never published a libretto without the aid of Kallman. “Their shared work [in the genre] generated a pleasurable domestic routine,” allowing them, as Auden and Kallman claim, in a co-written essay titled “Translating Opera Libretti,” to become “one new author” in both intellectual, creative, and less vexed erotic terms.

Auden undoubtedly played some part in Chester Kallman’s unpublished translation and adaptation of Kafka’s *The Trial* into an opera libretto (Sastri 116; *Libretti* 483-4). Due to the fact that Auden’s handwriting never shows up in Kallman’s autograph notebook (although one can see his his scribbles in other Kallman notebooks of the time), Kallman’s adaptation of *The Trial*, drafted somewhere between 1948 and 1956, during a peak in the pair’s libretto output, has gone entirely unrecorded in Edward Mendelson’s thorough and prodigious documentation and publication of everything Auden and his associates ever wrote together. No one has so much as alluded to this project, still in manuscript form at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. Though the focus of my study is not Kafka’s novels, but the impact of Kafka’s fabulist stories on the creative landscape of late modernism, a brief glance at this translation will serve to reinforce the potency of the animal trope, even for those whose collaborations with Kafka’s texts seem, on

the surface, to preclude it. One of Kallman's few interpolations in his translation and adaptation of *The Trial* registers this trope at a critical stage in the opera.

Why this adaptation never materialized on the stage or in print is an open question. A likely hypothesis is that Kallman was preempted by Gottfried Von Einum's opera adaptation of the novel, which premiered at the New York City Opera in 1953, conducted by Joseph Rosenstock with a libretto by Ruth and Thomas Martin (*Variety* 57). A performance based on *The Trial*, called *The Scapegoat*, also appeared at the President Theatre in 1950, a dramatization by "Columbia University teacher John F. Matthews"; and yet another version of *The Trial*, adapted by Aaron Fine and Bert Greene, debuted at the Provincetown Playhouse in June 1955 (Bauland 169, 272-3). So the opera and drama scenes were well stocked with versions of *The Trial* in the early 50s. Additionally, the growing reputation of the Muirs in the 1950s as the authentic, canonical purveyors of Kafka's prose in English potentially contributed to a hesitation to go through with production or publication, despite the fact that Kallman was operating in a much different genre. Auden's lionization and admiration of the Muirs translations, in diverse essays and letters, could have caused the project to not come to fruition due to the obviation of such original enterprises after the efforts by what Auden termed "our best translator" (sadly, Willa Muir—despite splitting translation duties with her husband, Edwin—rarely garnered praise).

Kallman's libretto, written on roughly 70 notebook pages, consists primarily of dialogue or lyrics and a minimal amount of stage direction. Metrical notations are usually recorded at the top of the pages. The libretto also serves as a translation and adaptation of the German text into an American English much different from other translations of the time. In Kallman's version, he deviates from the Muirs' more polished, periphrastic rhetoric. Two typical examples of many are

labeling the court officials “woman chasers” instead of the Muirs’ “petticoat-hunters” and using the word “shed” instead of “lumber-room” in “The Whipper” chapter. Kafka’s novel is also, naturally, distilled to a fraction of the size. The nine-part libretto is a masterclass in syncopation.

The libretto is still very much in draft form but is, in its own way, just as complete as Kafka’s novel, and traces Joseph K.’s frustrated quest from indictment to execution. Little is completely removed and not whittled, simplified, or summarized—minus the chapters “Fräulein Bürstner’s Friend,” “Block the Tradesman,” and the “Dismissal of the Lawyer”—the latter notoriously unfinished and the former two peripheral for a writer attempting to steamroll through the essentials of the novel’s plot. However, there are a few notable exceptions. The parable “Before the Law,” curiously, does not appear at all. K.’s execution by the two tenor-looking assassins “is not visible” in Kallman’s version—the knife thrust into the heart and turned twice is censored out and reminds one of less graphic maneuvers in later adaptations, such as Orson Welles’ 1962 film version of *The Trial*, in which the two goons refuse to stab K. and instead throw a stick of dynamite into the quarry—the explosive plume suggesting rather than showing K.’s demise.

The omission of the centerpiece of the “In the Cathedral” chapter—the parable that Kafka published separately as “Before the Law”—along with its exegesis by the priest is significant. Not from a dramatic standpoint, perhaps. Kallman had to find a creative solution to compress the chapter to an acceptable length for opera. The parable—on the surface, concerning a man from the country and the gatekeeper who refuses him admission into the radiant doorway of the Law—is at bottom a conceit about K.’s own relation not only to the Law but to the priest acting as an unyielding gatekeeper. Their disputation and rhetorical back-and-forth over the interpretation of the story, along with the priest’s rehearsal of “various opinions” about the “scriptures” that



ultimately “express the commentators’ despair,” is a linchpin of Kafka’s late style and reminds one of the disputatious relativism of Auden’s “Law Like Love” (Corngold 6). The exclusion of the parable and its commentary from Kallman’s libretto sets it in counterpoint to the trend that takes this investigative or deductive style, unpacking a central myth or set of myths, as a cornerstone of the Kafka effect.

Nevertheless, Kallman’s rendition of central passages of the “In the Cathedral Chapter” is worth pausing over. Instead of a priest, Kallman translates “Geistliche” as a protestant minister. This is a potential jab at Auden’s protestant faith; subtle jabs of this kind were typical of Kallman, who “aired his contradictory feelings” towards Auden “in the columns he wrote as opera reviewer for *The Commonwealth*” wherein he describes, for instance, Hans Sachs “as a tired old man, bitter about his age, disappointed in love, unsatisfied by his art...trying to be one of the boys” (Auden first began his relationship with Kallman when he was 32 and Kallman was 18) (*Early Auden, Later Auden* 581). Such statements, Edward Mendelson tells us, were potshots at Auden’s “paternal manner” (Ibid.). The very end of Kallman’s section 8, the final pronouncement by the minister and the ensuing stage direction, are key revisionary moments:

Min: So I am a servant of the Court, and why should there be more that I might want of you now? For the Court has made no claims. You are received, when you come, and when you go, you are released. (The Min. runs up the steps with the soundless speed of a rat & disappears into the darkness. Surrounded by utter darkness. K. stands motionless; in the center of a pool of dim light. Suddenly in two similar pools of light near K, stand two gentlemen in black frock-coats & top hats. K. looks them over curiously but stays in his place.) [The men nod; each one points to the other with his top-hat in his hand.] [The second acts as though he were dumb.] (Auden Collection)

Compare the end of the section to the Muirs’ translation of the German original:

„Ich gehöre also zum Gericht“, sagte der Geistliche. „Warum sollte ich also etwas von dir wollen. Das Gericht will nichts von dir. Es nimmt dich auf, wenn du kommst, und es entlässt dich, wenn du gehst.“ (*Der Prozess* 139).

“That means I belong to the Court,” said the priest. “So why should I want anything from you? The Court wants nothing from you. It receives you when you come and it dismisses you when you go.” (Muir and Muir)

The Muirs’ translation is much more literal, which is not a surprise given the direct generic transmission from novel to novel. Neither Kafka’s original nor the Muirs’ translation, of course, contains the final stage direction in Kallman’s libretto. Kallman derives much of this text from an earlier part of the “In the Cathedral” chapter and the first paragraph of the next chapter, Chapter Ten, “The End.” What might seem like a small addition, a minor detail, actually continues the trend that showcases the Auden group’s fascination with the animal fable. In the Muirs’ version, when the priest first ascends the steps to the pulpit, they write that he “swung himself lightly on to the stairway and mounted into the pulpit with short, quick steps.” In Kallman’s adaptation, this passage is moved to the very end of the chapter and the minister instead “runs up the steps with the soundless speed of a rat & disappears into the darkness” (Auden Collection). Along with the minister being even more directly complicit in Joseph K.’s demise by absconding exactly when the two stage actors or “tenors” appear to abduct and execute him, the minister transforms metaphorically into a “rat,” a word Kafka and the Muirs never use to describe the priest (Auden Collection). This metaphorical transformation harkens back to the various transformation scenes in *The Dog Beneath the Skin* and other animal stories produced by the Auden circle, though here we have neither an outsider on the fringes of a community (the dogs), half-domesticated hybrids (the half-cat, half-lamb or gander), or a wild goose, caterpillar, or whale commenting on the

wobbly boundaries between ideological or existential walls. Instead we have the “rat”—who is represented so often by culture, unlike the ‘mouse’ (such as Kafka’s Josephine) as a vermin, a pest, an *Ungeziefer*, a disease-spreader, as a modern man warped by, and complicit in, systems of power (whether capitalist, Judeo-Christian, or familial)—both a mirror and an inverse of Gregor Samsa. The ‘dirty’ or parasitic animal figuring as a critique of society becomes a much more visible motif in Kafka rewritings after the war (see, for instance, Oscar Tarcov’s *Bravo, My Monster* (1953)), when the Muirs published their translation of “The Metamorphosis” in the short story collection *The Penal Colony* (1948). But here, in Kallman’s translation, the zoomorphic metaphor of the rat interrupts or destabilizes the theological expertise of the minister and casts suspicion on his position as a privileged arbiter of spiritual and ethical knowledge. In the original, the hallowed, mysterious authority of Kafka’s minister is never undermined or questioned. Kallman’s man-animal produces, quite subtly, what Agamben calls “a fracture” or a “zone of indeterminacy” in the text; it is a microcosm of a larger movement in late modernism that mobilizes Kafka’s animals to express anxieties about the contingency of mankind and desires to think and imagine outside of humanistic paradigms—even when the contours of those alternatives cannot be precisely drawn (Agamben 36-7). The perplexing space between the “humanization of the animal” and the “foreigner...as figure of an animal in human form” became a minor though productive staging ground for the art of the Auden group at a time in which the “order of things” was being hotly reconceived (Seshadri 27; Agamben. 37; Foucault i).

## CHAPTER IV

### Anna Kavan and the British Surrealists

#### I

In 1984, the Centre Pompidou in Paris held an exhibition called “Le Siècle de Kafka” (Kafka’s Century), gathering the works of diverse artists, from Kafka’s own sketches and doodles, to sculptures by Alberto Giacometti, drawings by Alfred Kubin, Paul Klee, and Max Ernst, and contemporary photographs of Prague and the Kafka milieu, along with images and physical copies of the the first editions of Kafka’s books in English, German, French, and Czech; these objects were supplemented with reflections by Walter Benjamin, Jorge Luis Borges, André Breton, and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others, and video interviews with Eugène d'Ionesco and Félix Guattari (David 15-20). In this exhibition, Kafka’s links to the expressionist and surrealist movements in art are reinforced through a retrospective gaze that imagines Kafka’s person and work as a fulcrum for western culture in the twentieth century. While many critics over the past 100 years have derided pigeonholing Kafka as a surrealist himself, his work nevertheless was extremely important for subsequent surrealist writers and artists on the continent, in Britain, and in America. In France, in particular, he was read as “pure surrealism” at a time when the surrealist movement, founded around 1920, had been “vulgarized” as a stand-in for “the very idea of modernity” (Szanto 168). Marthe Robert especially derided the surrealist abuses and

misreadings of Kafka (Robert 315). Yet Kafka's appropriation by surrealists like André Breton and Max Ernst should not be condemned but rather studied as an important component of Kafka's international reception and adaptation that had particular repercussions on the British scene. Only recently have scholars of art history, like Kirsten Strom, in her *The Animal Surreal: The Role of Darwin, Animals, and Evolution in Surrealism* (2017), charted the centrality of anthropocentric critiques in the development of the surrealist movement. What Strom terms the "Darwinian uncanny," in which the bodies of nonhumans such as "horses, sparrows, and lizards are easily distinguished from those of a human body [yet are] demonstrably similar and clearly related nevertheless," vitalizes the surrealist imagination and informs its iconography, collage techniques, etc.; the fact that the fabulist content of Kafka's stories (such as his fantastic hybrids) sets its claws in the surrealist writers and painters examined in this chapter adds fuel to Strom's argument about the surrealist desire to provide a corrective to what André Breton calls the hubristic "error" that is one of the most "detrimental...for mankind" (Strom 13, 10). Celebrated surrealists like Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst were energized by the content of Kafka's fables, while lesser-known British surrealists like David Gascoyne, Ruthven Todd, Anna Kavan, and William Sansom were energized by both his form and content; the former were appropriators, while the latter were true imitators. Addressing the first group, and highlighting a series of correspondences, images, and echoes between their works of visual and verbal art and Kafka's writing, will demonstrate the Kafka effect at the abstracter level of influence--the level that has driven multiple critical studies of Kafka's post-war impact. The section on the British writers Anna Kavan and William Sansom, in particular, will address at some length acts of deep and direct imitation in which exchanges between anterior and posterior text are lively, telling us much more about the specific stylistic and thematic forms transmission took.

## II. The Appropriations of Leonora Carrington

The life of a young Leonora Carrington, lover of Max Ernst and one of the most original and dedicated surrealist painters, was forever altered after reading Herbert Read's *Surrealism*. She attended the 1936 surrealist exhibition at New Burlington Galleries in London, becoming intoxicated with the work of Max Ernst and meeting him shortly thereafter. The two began a stormy relationship that was interrupted and later broken irreparably by Ernst's incarceration during WWII in a prison camp and Carrington's ensuing descent into madness and confinement in a Spanish asylum. *Down Below* (1944), which documents her psychological breakdown and the schizophrenic environment of the asylum, is a classic of institutional literature (comparable to Anna Kavan's *Asylum Piece*). Carrington's mentor and muse, the German painter Max Ernst, turns out to be one of the earliest artists to illustrate texts by Kafka, and this has consequences for Carrington's own visual and verbal art. Ernst produced three illustrations in the late 30s: one for Kafka's short story "Odradek" or "Cares of a Family Man" in the French surrealist journal *Minotaure* (1936), a frontispiece frottage for the flash fiction piece "The Tower of Babel" (1937), and frontispiece collage for the surrealist story collection *Un divertissement* (1938), named after Kafka's fable "A Sport" or "A Crossbreed" (see Skira; Ryerson and Burnham Libraries Special Collections). Most of these illustrations are extremely rare and hard to come by since their print runs often did not exceed 70 (Ryerson and Burnham Libraries Special Collections). For a different edition of *Un divertissement*, Leonora Carrington's "House of Fear," written in French, with illustrations by Ernst, appeared alongside Kafka's "La Chevauchee du Seau" or "The

Bucket Rider” plus a section containing forty of Kafka’s “Notes and Aphorisms” (Notes Et Aphorismes).

The only full-length essay on the Ernst-Kafka connection has been written by one of the world experts on Ernst’s work, Walter Spies, and not translated into English. Spies writes that Ernst was “the only member of the Parisian surrealist circle who read *The Great Wall of China* collection in the original [*my translation*]” and notes how crucial Kafka was for Ernst during the years he was developing his own aesthetic and theoretical position (Spies 217-18). Ernst’s enthusiasm for a slightly different set of Kafka stories than his British counterparts in the 1930s can be explained by the fact that he not only encountered the texts in the original German (unlike so many of his contemporaries, even in Germany) but also read them in Alexandre Vialette’s 1928 translation of the story collection titled *La Metamorphose* (1928). As well as reading *The Metamorphosis* earlier than those across the pond, he read “The Country Doctor,” “The New Advocate,” “Jackals and Arabs,” “A Crossbreed,” and “The Cares of a Family Man.” He therefore took the hybrid, the uncanny animal, and the composite and unidentifiable object as nuclei of the Kafka effect, most obviously represented by the figure of Kafka’s “Odradek,” a textbook surrealist object: “a flat star-shaped spool for thread...a small wooden crossbar sticks out of the middle of the star, and another small rod is joined to that at a right angle....One is tempted to believe that the creature is now only a broken-down remnant...” (469). Odradek is an image of surrealist alchemy at its finest (a subject that fascinated both Ernst and Carrington). Ernst “compared the technique of the collage to the alchemical process,” calling it ‘something like the alchemy of the visual image’. In the words of the British surrealist popularizer David Gascoyne, “The meticulously assembled early collages [of Ernst] present incongruous

juxtapositions of assorted ready-made images culled from” everyday reality and the Jungian collective unconscious of universal archetypes; Ernst himself called this hybridization “the exploitation of the chance meeting of two distant realities on an unfamiliar plane” (*Selected Prose* 443).

Leonora Carrington, especially in her early paintings, adopted Ernst’s techniques that foregrounded anthropomorphism, “biomorphism,” and “geologization of the body” (Bouvier 114). Her short stories also incorporated these elements, inflected by various Kafka-esque touches. As in Ruthven Todd’s *The Lost Traveller*, Leonora Carrington fondly adopts Kafka’s preference for initials and solitary letters over names (in allegorical style) in stories about hybrids, like “Sand Camel” and “The Neutral Man.” Her own idiosyncratic bestiary is full of hyenas, black horses, anthropomorphic sheep, carnivorous rabbits, and numberless creatures in between (especially in her paintings); this bestiary may not have been derived from Kafka, but she was certainly influenced by him at the time she was first developing her bizarre menageries in writing and painting. There are strong resonances and elective affinities between their work. The figure of the horse, for example, was very important to Kafka, Ernst, and Carrington. Carrington’s fairy tales swerve from prototypes of that genre in their representation of the animal, which defy archetypal ethical categories of virtue, guile, and sexual/gustatory desire, existing outside and in-between physical and spiritual norms. Kafka’s “The Country Doctor,” which Carrington read in French, certainly informed her representations of the horse.

In “The House of Fear,” a charismatic horse invites the penniless narrator to a party. They travel through the bitter cold to the Castle of Fear, a palace of ice-stones, where all the horses in the world have gathered “with foam frozen to their lips” for their annual rendezvous with the



Mistress of Fear (Carrington 36). She challenges them to an occult game involving numbers, memories, and omens. The story breaks off with the narrator anxious about the Mistress' huge, solitary eye observing her with terrible acuity. Tiny similarities exist between Carrington's horse and Kafka's in "The New Advocate," wherein Dr. Bucephalus, Alexander the Great's old charger and the only modern survivor of the classical past, spends his time not with war, but with the law, turning "the pages of...ancient tomes" (453-4). Both anthropomorphic horses mount steps and the peculiarities of their gaits while performing this action are magnified in slow motion. But the most evocative resonances occur between Carrington's "Pigeon, Fly" and Kafka's "The Country Doctor." In "Pigeon, Fly," black horses alternate between moving at fantastic speeds across great distances and utter, complete stillness. The artist-narrator of the story is asked by a princely, wig-wearing sheep to paint the portrait of his deceased wife. The narrator is then transported to the middle of a forest to paint the portrait: "I'd hardly had time to observe all this when Ferdinand gave his horse a tap with his whip and we were plunging at full gallop headlong through an avenue, throwing up earth and stones behind us. This journey went so quickly that I wasn't even able to look around me (Carrington 61). Likewise, the groom in Kafka's "A Country Doctor" provides the doctor with a similar pair of magnificent horses. Before he assaults the doctor's servant girl, Rose, the groom "clapped his hands; the gig whirled off like a log in a freshet...I was deafened and blinded by a storming rush that steadily buffeted all my senses. But this only for a moment, since, as if my patient's farmyard had opened out just before my courtyard gate, I was already there; the horses had come quietly to a standstill" (251). The horses in both stories "whinny" with an uncanny communicativeness and seem to possess arcane knowledge. Basic anthropomorphic qualities seen in fables and fairy tales are problematized by associating the

animals with heavenly and diabolical powers at the same time. They are trickster figures as well as creatures who can initiate or carry the narrators into different modes of being—often with negative consequences at the end of the stories.

This catalogue of images and thematic echoes shows, at the very least, the elective affinities between two mainsprings of the surrealist movement and Franz Kafka's work and helps set the stage for more direct surrealist re-writers of Kafka's animal stories and fables. But it also reflects a shortcoming, a shortcoming apparent in the few major studies of Kafka's postwar international influence, such as Daniel Medin's *Three Sons: Franz Kafka and the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee, Philip Roth, and W.G. Sebald* (2010), which tracks the dispersal of Kafka's "hovering tropes" in postmodernist literature (Medin 25). Literary allusions and Bloomian misprisions or solipsistic misreadings are the methodological portals through which Medin connects Kafka's predecessors to Kafka and to one another; and Medin culls his allusions frequently from Kafka's diaries and letters, the "hovering tropes" being, for example, Kafka's "filial ambivalence" and "relation to his father, his writing, and to his time," as well as to Judaism (Medin 15, 36). The Kafka legend, the biographical Kafka mined from diaries, letters, and apocryphal accounts, such as Max Brod's *Franz Kafka* (1937), is instrumental to the picture of literary genetic transfer constructed by Medin. The Kafka legend wasn't bolstered by the diaries until 1948 in English (although excerpts appeared in various journals), and the writers in this study were less invested in Kafka as a person or figure as in sets of specific texts and cognate texts. Kafka as linguistic outsider, as Jew, as frustrated son, as erotic trainwreck, etc., took a backseat to the particular formal and thematic bundles in Kafka's fiction, though these elements of Kafka's identity still acted to color and shade his early reception, however subtly. The imitations of Kafka's incipits

by David Gascoyne and Ruthven Todd, and the much more exhaustive imitations of Anna Kavan and William Sansom, will lead us away from Kafka's famous longer anthropocentric narratives (*The Trial*, *The Castle*, "The Judgment," "The Hunger Artist," etc.) that often form the backbone of Medin's and Sandbank's studies of postwar influence.<sup>8</sup>

### III. The Incipits of David Gascoyne and Ruthven Todd

Surrealist currents did not enter British artistic consciousness until a belated period, about fifteen years after its development out of Dada in the mid 1930s. These developments came to a head during the London International Surrealist Exhibition of 1936, organized by the British surrealist poet and popularizer David Gascoyne, Herbert Read, Paul Nash, Ruthven Todd, André Breton, Paul Eluard, and Man Ray. Gascoyne's *Short Survey of Surrealism*, published in 1935, in addition to Herbert Read's *Surrealism* in 1936, stoked interest in the movement in Britain and doubled down on surrealism's communist political investments. Near the end of Gascoyne's *Short Survey*, he writes that "surrealism transcends all nationalism and springs from a plane on which all men are equal" and goes on to underline the "unchanging political position of the surrealists in opposing bourgeois society, attacking religion, patriotism and the idea of family, and in declaring their belief in the principles of Communism and their solidarity with the proletariat of all countries"—a plangent echo of the final line in Marx and Engel's *Manifesto*: "Working men of all countries unite!" (133). The project of creating a "surreal world," a "new way of knowing the world," becomes an important refrain in surrealist discourse, overturning

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<sup>8</sup> Although Medin does give airtime to "The Burrow" and "The Hunter Gracchus."

values and unleashing latent desires in ways consonant with the more cosmopolitan strains of Marxism and psychoanalytic theory (129). Breton and Gascoyne put on ‘trial’ “the real world” with the revolutionary and universal energy of the unconscious that can break through ossified ways of thinking. For both men, Kafka’s work could help unlock this energy. Breton wrote about Kafka on multiple occasions and included him as one of the prophetic “thunderheads” of the movement in the surrealist journal *Minotaure* (3).

An excursus on a few of the central figures of British surrealism, and their utilizations of Kafka’s work, will help to show the breadth of Kafka’s impact on this 1930s and 40s creative faction and reveal the (perhaps unsurprising) impact of Kafka’s most famous creaturely story, *The Metamorphosis*. Yet the utilization of *The Metamorphosis* took quite specific forms that should not be overlooked. Gascoyne, for one, overtly appropriated elements of “The Metamorphosis” in his only published story “Death of an Explorer” (1939). In 1979, “Death of an Explorer” was reissued and Gascoyne writes in his “Introductory Notes” that the story “seems to show, if anything, a certain influence of Kafka, whom I must have already read a little of at that time in one or other of the earliest volumes of the Muirs’ translations, or perhaps in a translation of *The Metamorphosis* published by David Archer at the Parton Press” (*Journal* 15). As Paul Ray writes, “Since Kafka became known in England at about the same time as surrealism, the superficial similarities between the two permitted a blending which resulted in novels having an overall vaguely Kafka-esque intention, but drawing on surrealism for smaller effects. These effects were usually visual and relied heavily on surrealist painting” (Ray 297-8). This is certainly the case for Gascoyne’s story, which combines geographic isolation and occlusion with the surrealist dreamscape; nevertheless, distinct rhetorical bundles were deployed

by Gascoyne and some of his contemporaries to align themselves with efforts to revive or reiterate the signifying power of the dream state.

“Death of an Explorer” tells of the experiences of one Mr. Parker, “a middle-aged, undistinguished-looking man, who work[s] for a firm of insecticide manufactures” and is called away to “demonstrate...products in towns in some quite distant part of the country” (111). Gascoyne ironically casts Mr. Parker as a foil or enemy to the insect Grego Sansma, since he works in the business of pest control. His sense of rational boundaries, however, is swiftly undercut. During one of these business journeys he wanders through an unnamed foreign town, intending to sight-see. He ends up on the premises of a mysterious and sinister Palace, where people either avoid him, refuse to proffer information, or abruptly disappear. Eventually he makes his way into a disused torture chamber. Because of the sudden, imperious shouting of an “official,” he falls into a “gaping pit,” to his death. One can identify a connection between Gregor Samsa’s humdrum occupation as a commercial traveler and Mr. Parker’s. The arcs of the two stories correspond roughly, too, since both protagonists erode psychologically in piecemeal fashion and have their lives terminated at the narratives’ conclusions. But there is one sentence, in the second paragraph of “Death of an Explorer,” that directly recycles language from *The Metamorphosis*. It begins: “He woke up one Sunday morning in a strange bed, and remembered that he had arrived the previous night in a town he had never visited before...” (Ibid.). Readers of Kafka will immediately recognize the opening line of *The Metamorphosis* (here rendered by A.L. Lloyd): “As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from a troubled dream, he found himself changed in his bed to some monstrous kind of vermin” (Lloyd 12). The textual echoes are clear enough. Waking from the dream world of sleep catalyzes experiences of estrangement and

disorientation in which the self and its spatial and temporal purchase suddenly loosens and slips. It's important to recognize Gascoyne's attraction to Kafka's "incipit." The incipit simply refers to the opening lines of any text. Gian Biagio Conte has noted how openings "have a high degree of memorability...thanks to the prominence given by initial position" (Conte 35). British surrealist writers often lightly adapted Kafka's first lines or a somewhat random scheme of motifs, treating them like found objects to be manipulated, scrambled, and overwritten.

The Scottish poet and novelist Ruthven Todd was also drawn to the charm of the incipit of "The Metamorphosis" in his fiction. "At the last minute," Todd was "recruited as assistant secretary to the committee" at the 1936 surrealist exhibition in London and was, for a time, a well-known figure in the British surrealist scene, even rescuing Salvador Dalí from a diving helmet screwed on too tightly at the New Burlington Galleries Exhibition, where the Spaniard gave a nautically-clad lecture (Ray 135). Todd wrote a sonnet titled "Franz Kafka" in which the Law, in the guise of either Kafka's "father or God," reveals itself through a crack in the wall as a "gorgon face" (*The Planet in My Hand* 23). Minus the surrealistic touches, the poem doesn't have much to offer. Todd's more interesting and specific dealings with Kafka's work occur in his two novels. In a "Preface" to *The Lost Traveller* (1943), he writes: "In *Over the Mountain* [his earlier novel published in 1939] I had tried, a long way after Kafka, to write a quest novel which was valid for my time" (1). Despite superficial resonances with *The Castle* in *Over the Mountain*—contrary to his claim—it is really *The Lost Traveller* that integrates Kafka's work most extensively into a surrealist quest narrative. Writers of the time were aware of Todd's debt in *The Lost Traveller*. Anna Kavan wrote that the novel "inevitably reminds one of Kafka. There is the Kafka atmosphere of horror, the sense of impending doom and of incalculable, merciless forces

at work.” Sadly, however, the sinister Kafka genius is not there” in her estimation (“Selected Notices” 141).

Christopher Aukland, the protagonist of *The Lost Traveller*, is guiltlessly tried and burdened with a mysterious “case” by the authoritarian government of an anonymous city; like Joseph K., he does not know “the nature of the crimes upon which he was to be arraigned” (93). Aside from thematic similarities with Kafka’s novels, however, there are numerous direct borrowings from *The Metamorphosis*. After he is transported to a desert strewn with blue diamonds at the novel’s beginning, Christopher worries “about someone else [getting] his job” and the censure of his parents, with whom he lives, along with that of his boss, all in a plangent echo of the apparent lassitude of Gregor Samsa at the beginning of *The Metamorphosis*; Christopher regrets that this fantastic awakening happened “on the very afternoon that he was to get the job, which, he hoped, would make him independent of his parents” (13). After journeys, obstacles and dead-ends, tricks, and side-quests—all in the typical manner of the allegorical quest-narrative—he is sent to hunt down a fabulous creature known as the Great Auk. In the final paragraph, after the end of his picaresque journey, Christopher himself metamorphoses into an *Ungeziefer*, the Great Auk (a bad pun on his last name, Aukland), growing “firm brown skin” and a “wrinkled black...bird’s leg,” unambiguously reworking the language from the first paragraph of *The Metamorphosis*, in which Gregor observes his “hard brown belly” and “pitifully thin” legs (164; 114). The most unequivocal repurposings of Kafka’s story, however, can be seen in Todd’s numerous deployments of *The Metamorphosis*’ first sentence. The opening line of *The Lost Traveller* reads: “The country where Christopher found himself was certainly very strange” (9). In Chapter Ten learn that: “When he work in the morning Christopher found

himself lying in a huge bed in the middle of an otherwise empty room” (130). The iterations of this incipit, interspersed within landscapes of butterfly-covered cacti and beautiful bananas, combines de Chirico with the uncanniness of “finding oneself” in a strange bed—both the same person and profoundly different. The act of waking divides the unitary subject into multiple selves which cannot be easily reconciled. Kafka helped these writers compactly articulate this existential dilemma and join it to anxieties and fantasies about the otherness of the human body.

#### **IV. Anna Kavan’s Ice Age Dreams**

In 1966, Anna Kavan—in an exchange with her editor Peter Owen about his reluctance to publish her novel *Ice* unrevised—comments on Kafka’s (as well as Marvel’s three-year-old comic *The Avenger’s*) marketability and expresses satisfaction over a reader’s evaluation of her manuscript:

How interesting that your reader finds the writing a mixture of Kafka and the Avengers—this expresses quite accurately the effect I was aiming at. Considering Kafka’s reputation and the success of *The Avengers*, I can’t think why you don’t want the book as it is!  
(Callard 136)

Kavan was one of Kafka’s closest readers and most enthusiastic rewriters. Brian Aldiss, a critic and friend of Kavan’s later in life, perceptively dubs her “Kafka’s sister” (Aldiss 14). She is, perhaps, finally beginning to receive the accolades she deserves. Discussion online of her novel *Ice* has burgeoned over the past decade (*LCWR 14*; Lessing 2006). A narrative some have categorized as science fiction (and by Kavan herself as a “present day fable”), *Ice* deals with an



unnamed protagonist's obsessive, hallucinatory search for a strange woman in a post-apocalyptic ice age. But aside from this masterpiece, reissued in November 2017 by Penguin Classics, contemporary critics are silent. During her lifetime Kavan was admired by many writers, such as Edwin Muir, Anaïs Nin, and her close friend and executor Rhys Davies, but never achieved significant recognition beyond intimate circles.

Kavan's life was eventful, eccentric, and, like many of her generation, marked by tragedy. She was born in 1901 in France to English parents, but was practically abandoned early on and sent to boarding schools in Europe and America. In 1911, her father committed suicide by jumping off the stern of an ocean liner. Throughout her life, Kavan suffered harrowing mental breakdowns resulting in stints at sanatoriums—these experiences later contributed to an abiding interest in psychoanalysis. Kavan 'turned her back' on wartime Britain, wandering across the globe from 1939-42, alighting in Norway, Indonesia, Mexico, California, New York, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, and Bali, among a host of other places—but was unable to escape the war's reach (Reed 58-65). At one point, the ship on which she was a passenger barely escaped attack by a German submarine; she was forced to return to England after her son Bryan went missing in action; and in 1944 she "[temporarily worked] in a military psychiatric unit specializing in the psychological casualties of the war" (Reed 51, 53-80, 83). Her life was punctuated by a thirty-year drug addiction—to cocaine, opium, morphine, and especially heroin—that was a centerpiece of her life and probably contributed to her death in 1968; Rhys Davies found her "sprawled across the bed, a syringe in her arm and her head resting on the lacquered box in which she stored her heroin" (Reed 177). Her transatlantic upbringing and extensive travels gave her a thoroughly cosmopolitan outlook yet after the war she dropped her anchor in

London. In 1943 she met her platonic soulmate and later creative collaborator, the German psychoanalyst Dr. Karl Theodore Bluth, who helped drag her out of suicidal depression on multiple occasions and supplied her “legally acquired heroin” (Callard 78). Her paintings drew from a range of modernist styles, from cubism to surrealism and expressionism, and seem to cite such artists as Edvard Munch, Egon Schiele, the Blaue Reiter group, Giorgio de Chirico, Frida Kahlo, and incorporating, at times, Max Ernst’s frottage technique. There are occasional resemblances to Leonora Carrington’s paintings, but it’s uncertain whether Kavan ever saw the latter’s work or was aware of her art and fiction, though it’s likely given Kavan’s surrealistic bent. Her art is obsessed with hybridity, with corporeal transformation, distortion, and deletion, reveling in the symbiosis between human and nonhuman life. Existential solitude and fabulist iconography combine to showcase her peculiar brand of cosmopolitanism and what the critic Victoria Walker term’s Kavan’s experimental and “anarchistic tendencies” (Walker 42).

During a two-year period as a reviewer for Cyril Connolly and Stephen Spender’s magazine *Horizon*, Kavan shows herself to be immersed not only in psychoanalytic discourse (Connolly describes her to readers as “an expert on psychoanalytic methods”) but also in Kafka’s fiction and the contemporary literature that evokes him (Callard 78-9). In a review of William Sansom’s *Fireman Flower* (a book that we will turn to at length in this chapter), Kavan quotes (or rather slightly misquotes) W.H. Auden’s “New Year Letter” (1940) to describe Sansom’s book and distinguish it from Virginia Woolf’s “spun sugar witchcraft” in *A Haunted House*. Sansom, according to Kavan, “deals in...the...much less gracious enchantment of the psychological hinterland, the ‘labs where puzzled Kafkas meet the inexplicable defeat, the odd behaviour of the law, the facts which suddenly withdraw” (“Selected Notices” 283). Kafka,

Sansom, and Auden's disenchanted work contrasts with the "gracious enchantment" of high modernists like Woolf, engaging with the Dionysian elements of the human mind—"the fauna of the night," as Auden writes in his elegy for Freud.

It is no accident that Kavan officially changed her name in 1939—the year before her short story collection *Asylum Piece* (1940) was published—from Helen Ferguson (the surname of her much older, abusive first husband) to Anna Kavan. 'Kavan' is a Czech surname with a phonetic gesture towards her favorite writer, Franz Kafka, whose own Czech surname was originally spelled "Kavka," meaning "jackdaw" (Brod 3). Kavan once wrote: "Why does the K sound in a name symbolise the struggle of those who try to make themselves at home on a homeless borderland?," referring to the protagonists of *The Castle* and *The Trial* as well as her own persistent feeling of spatial and psychological maladjustment (Callard 61). The traditional dictum that the cosmopolitan is someone "of no fixed abode, or a man who is nowhere a stranger" is revised to "everywhere a stranger," reflecting the rootlessness and ennui of modern life and what Auden sees in the archetype of the homeless, wandering Jew embodied by Kafka. The uncanny, which is central to Kavan's aesthetics as well as Kafka's, relies, in part, on the ambivalence between home and homelessness, self and other, and is construed as a psychological cornerstone of a war-torn and refugee-strewn world.

Six books had been published under the name of Helen Ferguson, but the first to appear under Anna Kavan was *Asylum Piece*. Not only was this change catalyzed by the onset of global war and the aftermath of a severe mental breakdown, resulting in a protracted stay at a sanatorium in Switzerland; the short stories in this collection mark a radical shift in her style that was also the result of her contact with, and absorption of, Franz Kafka's prose. The few critics to

review *Asylum Piece* recognized both its power and pedigree. One, doubtlessly thinking of Kafka, writes that “[t]wo or three [stories], if signed by a famous name, might rank among the story-teller’s memorable achievements” (MacCarthy 1940). Anaïs Nin declares the collection “a classic equal to...Kafka” (Nin 172).

*Asylum Piece* consists of twenty-one interlocking short stories, eight of them within a semi-autonomous novella called “Asylum Piece.” Strangely enough, the stories within the “Asylum Piece” novella—with two exceptions—are less experimental and more in the spirit of the novels Helen Ferguson published before changing her name to Anna Kavan. The rest present us with a series of narrators on the brink of madness in isolated, claustrophobic, clinical worlds. Most often Kavan expresses her narrators through the first person singular, thus personalizing and anonymizing them. The solitary initial H in first story in the collection, “The Birthmark,” along with R and D in later stories in *Asylum Piece*—like Kafka’s K., A. and B. in “A Common Confusion” or H. in “A Married Couple”—also, in a different fashion, preserve a sense of intimacy while proclaiming anonymity, since they elide nominal information. *The Great Wall of China* (1933), which Kavan read so lovingly, did not include many of the well-known named characters in Kafka’s repertoire, such as Gregor Samsa, George Bendemann, Blumfeld, and Josephine; these characters did not appear until the Muirs’ *The Penal Colony* (1948). Thus Kafka’s fiction seemed doubly invested in the dialectic between alternate narratorial strategies—personal, even confessional on the one hand, and impersonal, abstract, and diagrammatic on the other to the 1930s readership since the first section (and bulk) of the *Great Wall* collection consists of first-person narratives (i.e. “Investigations of a Dog,” “The Burrow,” “The Great Wall of China,” and “The Giant Mole”). Nominal ‘undoing’ has a lineage in allegorical tradition and

becomes especially pervasive in its late modernist permutation. It stems from the tendency to cast characters as everymen or to equate them with a constellation of abstract principles (often virtues and vices). It also jibes with the psychoanalytic model that renders every individual as products of the impersonal forces of the unconscious, as the distortions and repressions of a universal core of repetition. Kavan experiments with this dialectic between the deeply personal and impersonal. Her characters, while resonating with certain biographical details, have a “one-track mind” and are controlled or “driven by some hidden, private force...outside [their] own ego”—something that Angus Fletcher sees as essential ingredients of Kafka’s “psychological allegory” (40). In Kavan, the desires of characters are, like Kafka’s, daemonic, desperate, and monomaniacal. They must, at all costs, get out of some space or predicament but are slaves to systems of power (whether bureaucratic or supernatural) that preclude liberation.

Stories like “Asylum Piece II,” “Going Up in the World,” and “A Changed Situation” are “saturated” with Kafka signifiers (Genette 88). The experience of déjà vu is even more intense than in stories like “The Birthmark” that play upon the incipit, or opening sentences and paragraphs, of *The Castle*. In “Asylum Piece II,” Kavan repurposes passages from Kafka’s fable “The Bridge,” which confuses the boundaries between the narrator and bridge, between subject and object, between organism and thing; “Going Up in the World” directly imitates Kafka’s “The Bucket Rider” and “A Changed Situation” studiously reimagines the oft-imitated beast fable “A Crossbreed.”

In “Asylum Piece II,” Kavan tweaks the thematic register of “The Bridge” to focus on erotic loss and introduces new classes of “pre-historic” imagery:

I had a friend, a lover. Or did I dream it? So many dreams are crowding upon me now that I can scarcely tell true from false: dreams like light imprisoned in bright mineral caves; hot, heavy dreams; ice-age dreams...But now I am lying in a lonely bed. I am weak and confused. My muscles do not obey me, my thoughts run erratically...I wait, I wait...what am I waiting for?...(122-25)

Notice how Kavan absorbs and transforms Kafka's language and syntactic rhythms while rearranging verbal sequence:

I was stiff and cold, I was a bridge, I lay over a ravine...Far below brawled the icy trout stream...so I lay and waited; I could only wait...It was toward evening one day—was it the first, was it the thousandth? I cannot tell—my thoughts were always in confusion and perpetually moving in a circle...Who was it? A child? A dream?...(*GWC* 231-2)

The narrator-bridge 'lying over' "the impassible height" and Kavan's narrator 'lying in bed' are spatially and psychologically unmapped; landscape, whether external or internal, and confusion unite (just think of Dante's pilgrim 'lost in the dark wood') to set the stage for epistemological uncertainty. Neither narrator 'can tell' true from false or measure time because their 'thoughts' 'run erratically' or 'perpetually move in a circle'. Each use litanies of unanswerable questions—one of Kafka's favorite devices—to puzzle over whether they are 'dreaming' or not and to speculate about the identity of the person/thing they are (or have been) 'waiting' for. Paul de Man discusses the "aporia" or "semiological enigma" intrinsic to the "rhetorical question," writing that a "perfectly clear syntactical paradigm (the question) engenders a sentence that has at least two meanings, of which the one asserts and the other denies its own illocutionary mode" (de Man 131). The rhetorical question (and rhetoric in general), like allegory, generates at least "two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view" (Ibid.). Many of Kafka's imitators seemed to have an intuition about this and were attracted to his copious use of rhetorical

questions as a means for their narrators and characters to express skepticism, enigma, or amnesia. This rhetorical feature is complemented by “atavistic tendencies” that problematize the distinctions between present and past, human and nonhuman, nature and culture; agency over the body is lost as the mind is invaded by ice ages, mineral caves, brawling trout streams, and enemies whose identities can’t be pinned down or distinguished from the narrators’ anxious projections (Seitler 1).

“Going Up in the World” involves the narrator’s plight to restore her pitilessly cold and fog-bound room to a state of comfort by begging her wealthy, well-sunned landlords for mercy and assistance. They deny her request, proclaiming that she must reform herself in some unspecified manner (15). The narrator is ultimately sent careening down from their penthouse apartment in an elevator, back to the hopeless world. In different ways, the two narrators of “The Bucket Rider” and “Going Up in the World” “fly” away; one descends, the other ascends, but each is effectively eliminated by oppression, apathy, or downright cruelty. The events in Kavan’s piece are uncanny but not fantastic like Kafka’s. There is no bucket ridden like pegasus through the winter sky to prove to one’s potential benefactors (the coal dealer and his wife, in Kafka’s fable) how helpless one is; in Kavan’s case, a basket of apples performs a similar albeit less extraordinary function as an object embodying the narrator’s poverty and an elevator, rather than a bucket, propels her into solitude.

After the narrators escape their intolerable prison-rooms, they both encounter figures of power, a husband and wife pair. In “The Bucket Rider” the coal-dealer is cast as potentially sympathetic to the narrator’s cause while the coal dealer’s wife is antagonistic, thwarting the narrator’s desire and casting him into oblivion, into “the ice mountains,” with a wave of her

apron. In Kavan's story, alternatively, the husband *and* wife conspire against the narrator. In the end, they deny her plea:

'I am freezing with cold loneliness down there in the fog!' I exclaim in a voice that stammers with its own urgency; please be kind to me...Let me share a little of your sunshine and warmth. I won't be any trouble to you... 'But you don't understand,' I cry, and I am ashamed to feel tears in my eyes. 'It's a matter of life and death this time...It can't mean very much to you. But, oh, if only you knew how I long to live in the sunshine again!' (18, 20)

Near the beginning of Kafka's "The Bucket Rider," the narrator calls out to the coal dealer and his wife from the air where he hovers on the bucket. Compare this passage with the previous one:

"Coal-dealer" I cry in a voice burned hollow by the frost and muffled in the cloud made by my breath, "please, coal-dealer, give me a little coal. My bucket is so light that I can ride on it..." "I'm sitting up here on the bucket," I cry, and unfeeling frozen tears dim my eyes, "just once; you'll see me directly; I beg you, just a shovelful...All the other customers are provided for. Oh, if I could only hear the coal clattering into the bucket!" (*GWC* 234-5)

Kavan's style and structuring of ideas in the passage above is unmistakably modeled after Kafka's—the emphasis on defective 'voices' (one stammering with urgency', the other 'muffled' and 'burned hollow'), the pleading, the cries, the tears, the interjections ('oh'), and conditionals ('if only'). Both figures are driven to desperation to the point that they become flattened. The narrators, in their anxious, repetitive, self-absorbed pleas, become abstraction-like because they "do not exist outside of their roles"—in this case the role of the destitute alms-seeker (Arendt 102). Except for the knowledge that the narrators certainly interacted with and exchanged capital with their social superiors in the past, neither Kafka nor Kavan presents us with information



about their narrators' pasts. Anxiety directs their present-saturated, obsessive orientations; they are possessed by tragically microscopic quests to warm themselves. Physical and psychological anguish drive Kavan's narrators to become something like personifications of suffering that are gender nonspecific; they become transposable conditions. Nonetheless, a paradox persists. It is impossible to shake the sense that Kavan's narrators are mouthpieces for extremely private autobiographical experience in clinical torture-chambers. Kavan's personal reading and revision of Kafka is centrifugal, beginning at the level of the ego but moving towards abstraction, towards what Auden dubs "The I Without a Self"; and giving us, as Walter Sokel claims of Kafka, "pieces of an autobiography in metaphoric disguise" (Sokel 6-8). The "self" in Kavan is "dispossessed," "exhausted," and "petulant to the point of extinction," yet at the same time curiously omnipresent (Burnstein 3). Kafka's fable helps Kavan navigate a terrifying middle ground between self-expression and self-cancellation (the act of imitative writing parallels this dual movement, since one is concurrently the producer and the produced).

"A Changed Situation" mimics Kafka's "A Crossbreed" in a number of extended passages. One of Kavan's most fantastic pieces, the story introduces us to the narrator's house, which has anthropomorphized into a beast with a double nature—a tranquil day-persona and a harrowing id-like night-persona. Kafka's sport, or crossbreed, is a hybrid half-cat half-lamb whose nature is neither wholly feline, lamblike, nor human, but wavers between these extremes. A lengthy excerpt from both stories is worth quoting, because it will allow us to perceive how Kavan inventively sponges language while manipulating, like her predecessor, the beast fable:

When one has lived for seven years in the same house strange things are apt to take place. Of course, I am not speaking now about people who have lived all their lives in one house which they have perhaps inherited from their fathers...Lying peacefully curled up on a sunny day, the new house looks like a harmless gray animal that would eat out of your hand; at night the old house opens its stony, inward-turning eyes and watches me with a hostility that can scarcely be borne...Like a beast of prey the house lies in ambush for me...coiling itself round me it knows I cannot escape...Sometimes I almost burst out laughing when, in the level daylight, it turns its new face to me. Why this childish clinging to a pretense which misleads no one?...Only the tame gray animal confronts me, and seems as if it has rolled itself into a ball and is about to purr like a cat...[but] sooner or later, sure enough, there, beyond the new innocuousness, is the old head rearing up like a hoary serpent, charged with antique, sly, unmentionable malevolence; waiting its time. (31-4)

The text of “A Sport” is expressed in approximately the same number of words as Kavan’s rewriting; the flash fiction piece is a permutation of one of Kafka’s most beloved themes, the hazy taxonomic boundaries between animal and human, exemplified in, among others, the Dog, the Burrower, Odradek, Red Peter, the Jackals, and a diary dream in which Kafka encounters “a donkey that looked like a greyhound...[that] held itself erect like a human” (119). Kafka’s “A Crossbreed” begins:

I have a curious animal, half-cat, half-lamb. It is a legacy from my father...From the cat it takes its head and claws, from the lamb its size and shape; from both its eyes, which are wild and changing. Lying on the window-sill in the sun it curls itself up in a ball and purrs...Beside the hen-coop it can lie for hours in ambush, but it has never yet seized an opportunity for murder...In long draughts it sucks the milk into it through its teeth of a beast of prey. Naturally it is a great source of entertainment for children. Sometimes I cannot help laughing when it sniffs round me and winds itself between my legs and simply will not be parted from me. Perhaps the knife of the butcher would be release for this animal; but as it is a legacy I must deny it that. So it must wait until the breath voluntarily leaves its body, challenging me to do the thing of which both of us are thinking. (*GWC* 238-41)

Again, quotations and subtle transformations can be amply observed: the problems and anxieties of paternal/Oedipal inheritance; a creature that ‘lies in the sun and curls itself into a ball and purrs’; the “beast of prey” waiting in “ambush”; the thought or act of laughing at the creature’s antics; the emphasis on children or childishness, and the ‘waiting’ that must take place before any conclusion can be reached. Whether “A Changed Situation” deals with a projection, hallucination (the narrator raises the question of whether her network of oppressors and enemies are “a sort of projection of [herself]” in *Asylum Piece’s* final story), or a supernatural event is, in classic fantastic fashion, left unresolved (204). The punch-lines in “A Changed Situation” and “A Crossbreed” replace the moral precept or epigram in the traditional fable and involve ‘waiting’ or deferring outcomes that seem preordained and violent. Unlike other hybrid creatures—centaurs, satyrs, sphinxes, devils, etc.—Kavan’s house and Kafka’s crossbreed are companionless, having no set place in the pantheon of beings. They demonstrate the “arbitrariness” that Benjamin links to both allegory and fashion (*Arcades Project* 271). They undercut and “resist... conceptualization” or co-optation into any mythological scheme—be it German, Czech, Jewish, or Freudian (Cools and Liska 6).

Contemporaries, such as Edwin Muir, pick up on Kavan’s penchant for geographic occlusion (much unlike high modernists such as Yeats, Joyce, and Woolf, whose architectural structures and places are historically situated). In a 1956 review of her *Scarcity of Love* Muir observes: “The mere fact that no names are attached to the places which they occupy for a little and leave, that we do not know where they are, that the world for them has no geography and is without shape, intensifies this feeling: as if the world itself were lost” (“Among the Lost” 9). This “lost world” is what cosmopolitan fabulists of the 30s sought to portray as both a

description of, and possible antidote, to crisis. An overlooked strata of the artistically-manufactured uncanny that Freud discusses in his essay on the concept is the non-realist writer's "invented" or "chosen world" that "deviates" from the reader's familiar reality—which "withholds" the rules that govern it ("The Uncanny" 139). Kavan later echoes such an idea. She asserts that a post-war society—as she did with her former identity of Helen Ferguson—must "detach...from the past...[a]s I see it, the new life must detach itself from the past completely... What is wanted is a new earth and a new man to inhabit the earth" ("Selected Notices" 143). The unsexing of narratorial voice that only occasionally falters and the anonymizing and hybridization of inner and outer worlds creates a persistent feeling of estrangement in *Asylum Piece*; but it is a potentially productive kind of estrangement, since it confronts readers with common ties aside from species, gender, nation, and history that derive from the "psychological hinterland."

Jeremy Reed writes that Kavan, after her massive breakdown, "was reborn European, and much of *Asylum Piece*...gives its author a peculiarly anational feel, as though in reinventing herself she no longer owned to a specific nationality" (Reed 49). Cosmopolitanism—both as lived experience and aesthetic ideal—is essential to *Asylum Piece*. The exclusion of legally-identifiable individuals and nation-states is part of a project that sees the construction of "new worlds" as both imperative after the upheavals of WWII and as a way to link individuals through the articulation of trauma—itsself a kind of break or detachment. In a review of James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Kavan transitions to a discussion of the refugee crisis in postwar Europe, writing: "The problem raised is universal, not regional, and of the utmost urgency to all." She praises Kafka's "language of the subconscious" and, in another article, calls for

“neurosis [to] become...universal” (144). Kavan constructs an ethics and aesthetics on universalist grounds that draw from psychoanalysis while nevertheless remaining committed to the artistic expression of the unique aberrations that social life imposes upon the mental lives of all individuals.

#### **IV. William Sansom’s Firescapes**

Barring Rex Warner, William Sansom was the most talked-about Kafka “imitator” or “pastiche” writer of the 40s (Rajan 32-33). His work has benefited from a small recent revival due to his inclusion in Jeff and Ann VanderMeer’s anthology of 110 “weird” stories in *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (2011), with an “Afterweird” by China Miéville. The only writer whose fiction receives more than one appearance in the anthology is Sansom—not, as one might expect, the works of others like Kafka, H.P. Lovecraft, Angela Carter, Haruki Murakami, Joyce Carol Oates, China Miéville, or Kelly Link. Sansom is finally finding a home with the rise of the “New Weird” genre, which deals with the un-categorizable (especially the liminal figure of the monster and the composite body), the urban gothic, and the David Lynch-esque grotesque.

Faber & Faber released a new volume of Sansom’s fiction in 2010, plugging him “as London’s closest equivalent to Franz Kafka...producing modern fables” (Fowler). This is a longstanding motif since, in a 1945 issue of the *Partisan Review*, Sansom’s stories were also advertised as being “in the Kafka tradition” and by implication very “in” (431). Anna Kavan reviewed Sansom’s collection of stories, *Fireman Flower* (1944), and was ‘fascinated’ by his

“obscure allegories” and “dangerous territory of dream symbolism where all laws are incomprehensible” (284). She connects Sansom to Kafka with an excerpt from Auden and suggests a creative kinship between herself and Sansom. Like Sansom before her, she constructs surrealistic metropolises in her 1945 story “The City,” in which a simulacrum of an unnamed London “metamorphoses” into an “octopus,” “a trap,” and “a judge,” in which “lion-dogs” are the gold “standard” of citizenship, where she is both “banished” and “imprisoned” like a “refugee” neighbor, and where the bombs of “snarling planes” ‘scissor through her nerves’, turning the urban landscape into a “pandemonium” amidst which her ‘room floats like a lighted bubble’ (123-131). Strange confluences of the animate and inanimate world amid landscapes of fire and Blitzkrieg were also major preoccupations of Sansom.

William Sansom was born in 1912 in London. In the early 1930s he worked for the British branch of a German bank but moved back to England before the onset of WWII. During the war Sansom served in the Auxiliary Fire Service and wrote a chilling eyewitness account of the Blitz in *The Blitz: Westminster at War* (1947). Yet even in this supposedly nonfictional memoir, Stephen Spender (also a wartime fireman) notes in a “Foreword” that the narrative is patterned after Kafka, that “the influences which really fired [Sansom] in his fiction—and which sometimes do even here—are Kafkaesque and surrealist” (viii). Wartime London makes surrealist “isolation” a reality for Sansom. In *The Blitz*, a man encounters “the fantastic” in a shelter—a bomb with “a sharklike fin protrud[ing] from the water”; another man wakes up to half of his house destroyed and becomes “The City’s first freak” (Sansom prefers to use the more abstract, generic, yet—for initiated burghers of the time—intimate and colloquial “The City” instead of “London”); there is “a ritual apprehension” in the expressionistic “labyrinth of

Westminster's streets"; during "the little blitz" of 1944 a strangely "artificial" and "theatrical" London has "the atmosphere of the doll-shop, the shop for making plaster figures or people of wax" and the rescue workers transform into "a crowd of puppets" (31, 35, 175). Sansom taps into and appropriates E. Jentsch and Freud's discussions of "waxwork figures" and "dolls" to generate a highly uncanny City (*The Uncanny* 135). Thus, even in Sansom's nonfictional and documentary account of wartime London, the conventions of eye-witness realism are lightly adhered to. His experiences as a firefighter on the home front cast suspicion on documentary writing that does not emphasize the distortions of fear along with surprising and untoward juxtapositions. The metropolis, Sansom writes, is a better place to be than in the trenches, but nevertheless creates "a deeper mental discomfort, for the citizen lives still among familiar things...alienated and chilled in the shadow of war" (*Blitz* 11). The besieged metropolis embodies the uncanny like no other space. Stories like "The Wall" drive home the erasing, anonymizing, transformative power of fire (Mellor 47-51).

Spender perceptively notes that Sansom "achieves the extraordinary in managing to make his narrative personal, while keeping it completely anonymous," like his fellow *Horizon* contributor Anna Kavan, and that his "attitude" is "close to that of the painter." Sansom would have agreed with this assessment. In 1966, he acknowledged his early fascination with Kafka in a letter, writing:

I would not say that my work *now* is influenced much by Kafka—except in so much as his visual eye had the same peculiar clarity as the surrealists whose way of looking at things, of *isolating* objects or movements, etc., has always influenced me very strongly! (I am really a painter *manqué*). However, there are stories in my first book of short stories called *Fireman Flower*...which do show partly his influence...One must make in my

case one distinct statement—I was influenced by his form rather than his content. I loved his unfussy, clear, sinuous prose. I loved his continual humility and doubt...(Neumeyer 78)

Sansom was not an accomplished painter like Anna Kavan, but he shared her sensitivity to visual media and surrealism in particular. Others have documented Sansom's dealings with the surrealist movement at greater length, showing that it provided an important boost to his technical arsenal.<sup>9</sup> Surrealism and (disjunctive rather than conjunctive) allegory in *Fireman Flower* have been linked, but only offhandedly. Michael Golston writes that “at base, allegory, like surrealism, brings dissimilar images or objects into conjunction with few or no causal or syntactical connecting links...this conjunction leads, in turn, to the technique of collage” (Golston 34). While Sansom never dabbled in automatic writing, the surrealist techniques of collage, montage, and “isolation” were part of his practice. Isolation, which Sansom highlights in his letter, displaces items from their normative context much like allegorical displacement. Sansom's depictions of a City in ruins is made doubly uncanny due to allegorical and surrealist elements, which “cause...a kind of semiotic distress [and work] to *disfigure* and *unsettle* the world of things so that “only fragments of that world are left to it...” (Golston 39; Benjamin 349). Stories like “The Wall” use the technique “of what Mark Rawlinson has labelled ‘narrative de-acceleration’ that is, [expanding] the ‘timeless second’ of a fireman’s totalising and newly awakened perception that transforms him just as a warehouse falls upon him” (Mellor 51). By eliminating contextual information and opting for general categories

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, N.H. Reeve's “Surrealism, William Sansom, and the London Blitz” in *Surrealismo y Literatura en Europa*, 2001.



like “the City” and “the maze,” the “unfussy” allegorical style gives the reader a sense of being both everywhere and nowhere.

Sansom adds in the same letter that his favorite work of Kafka’s is *Amerika*, which is interesting on a few levels. On the one hand, it accounts for Sansom’s levity and comedy in *Fireman Flower*, since *Amerika* is undoubtedly Kafka’s most picaresque work. It is also Kafka’s most thorough experiment in the language of the concrete and the object-world of commodity capitalism, a world that is not pared down, minimalist, impoverished, as Kafka’s mature works tend to be. *Amerika* was generally ostracized in British and American critical evaluation from the magic circle of the Kafka canon—like most of the short stories we’ve discussed in the *Great Wall* collection. Writers of fiction, including Sansom, might have enjoyed its more materialistic style, but were less inclined to replicate its laxer investment in contextual hermeticism (the novel has defined points of reference like Germany, New York, and Oklahoma), the fantastic, and investigative-scientific discourse. In short, it was formally less experimental, less charged with, and transmissive of, radical allegorical technique. In 1938, Edwin Muir, in his “Introductory Note” to *Amerika*, “finds few traces of allegory in it” (even so, this won’t be the last time that the presence/lack of allegory in *Amerika* will surface in this study) (ix).

Kafka himself dabbled in proto-surrealist methods in early stories such as “Description of a Struggle” and mature pieces like “A Country Doctor.” His hearth and home was expressionism or the considerable grey area between the movements (Breton’s *Surrealist Manifesto* was published in 1924, the year of Kafka’s death), but versions of isolation, collage, and montage can be gleaned in *The Great Wall* stories, such as “The Hunter Gracchus.” In fact, this piece—the very first story in the “Short Stories and Fables” section—contains an incipit that attracted

Sansom so much that he mimics it quite studiously in one of his own stories (Conte 35). The first paragraphs of the leadoff story in the *Fireman Flower* collection, “Through the Quinqua Glass,” recycle the opening paragraphs of “The Hunter Gracchus”—a story that sees the eponymous protagonist eternally drifting in a liminal state between living human and ancient corpse.

Kafka infrequently begins a piece with a protracted sequence of sensory images. “The Hunter Gracchus” distinguishes itself sharply from the introspective and essayistic “thought stories” in the preceding “Longer Stories” section of the *Great Wall* collection. It begins:

Two boys were sitting on the harbour wall playing with dice. A man was reading a newspaper on the steps of the monument, resting in the shadow of a hero who was flourishing his sword on high. A girl was filling her bucket at the fountain. Through the vacant window and door openings of a café one could see two men quite at the back drinking their wine... Behind the boatmen two other men in dark coats with silver buttons carried a bier... Nobody on the quay troubled about the newcomers. (*GWC* 205-6)

This is one of Kafka’s most eccentric openings given its highly paratactic, visually rich style, along with its surprising concentration of characters acting in dumb show. Angus Fletcher includes this passage as an example of “paratactic enigma” and “anaphoric repetition” characteristic of the allegorical method, which “cue[s] the reader to think in terms of riddles” (Fletcher 174). Fletcher argues that Kafka’s rhythm “sets off a number of compartmented elements, all of which are seen simultaneously, in a timeless cross section whose static order is prima facie emblematic, like the order in a De Chirico painting” (173). On exhibit here is a series of images thrown into isolation with the introduction of the Hunter Gracchus’ bier; a rupture occurs within the choreographed lassitude of the scene. The montage-effect—which for Benjamin “connects dissimilars to shock an audience into insight”—reads like an

experiment with opening lines and narrative subject-matter—each sentence could be the launch-pad for an entirely different story (Eagleton 59). This ‘reconciliation’ of fragments is replicated in Sansom’s “Through the Quinqua Glass”:

Between us the crenellated shadow of the café awning drew a sharp division across the table...Over on the quay a sailor in a striped sweater trundelled a barrel of oil through the hot sunlight. Three curiously tall boys played a game of bowls with some small wooden balls. In the very middle of the road a lean honey-coloured dog with degenerate pale blue eyes stretched itself lazily for the flies. An old woman sat knitting beneath a dusty plane tree...And yet...here was a man in a severe black coat just arrived and taking his place in the long row of empty café tables. The man was a stranger to us. (5)

The *mise-en-scène* is virtually the same. The ‘café’, the ‘quay’, the ‘wine’, ‘sailors’ or ‘boatmen’, and the arrival of ‘strangers’ or ‘newcomers’. Both environments are pervaded with lethargy. Kafka’s picture is divided by the ‘shadow’ of a hero’s statue, Sansom’s with an awning’s ‘shadow’. Instead of two boys ‘playing with dice’, we have three boys ‘playing a game of bowls’. The only non-male figure in Kafka’s opening is ‘a girl’ while in Sansom’s we encounter the inverted figure of the ‘old woman’. In the former story men in ‘dark coats’ carry a bier with a ‘newcomer’ upon it; in the latter, a ‘stranger’ in a ‘severe black coat’ enters the scene. As in “The Hunter Gracchus,” the syntax is simple, the antithesis of the hypotactic style in “Investigations of a Dog.” Imagistic efficiency is increased by eliminating the rhetoric of speculation. In spite of this, the quotient of parabolic riddle-speak is not necessarily reduced. Surrealist montage functions alongside the paratactic style to isolate fragments and set them in an enigmatic sequence.

The subsequent stories in *Fireman Flower* exhibit a series of narrators and characters plunging through a phantasmagoria of sensorily dense environments—often the titles of the stories themselves: a “peach-house-potting-shed,” a “forbidden lighthouse,” a “maze,” a mansion, a ruinous “wall,” a prison and a burning coffee factory, to name a few. Most of his settings and buildings are displaced from familiar geographic locales and prove to be more or less hermetically-sealed. Yet even in his most autobiographical stories, like “The Wall,” which clearly situates the firefighting narrator within the conflagrations of the London Blitz as a building collapses in ultra slow-motion, Sansom writes:

There had been shrapnel, a few enquiring bombs, and some huge fires; but these were unremarkable and have since merged without identity into the neutral maze of fire and noise and water and night, without date and without hour, with neither time nor form, that lowers mistily at the back of my mind as a picture of the air-raid season. (167)

Dark or neutral tones, mazes, and mist—emblematic of epistemological uncertainty and hallmarks of the Kafkaesque—characterize a London that is never named, but always termed the City and purged of much particularizing information. If it were not for the fact that Sansom was writing in English, the City could be substituted for almost any other city in Europe under siege by Axis or even Allied forces. To a certain extent, “shrapnel,” “bombs,” and especially “air-raid” temporally orient the narrative but Sansom takes so much care to eliminate details extraneous to his narrator’s immediate impressions that these historical signposts—that do appear from time to time in the stories in *Fireman Flower*—come as jolts to the reader acclimated to decontextualized spaces. While Sansom does not include a specific non-human character in “The Wall,” there is a repeated emphasis on disassociation, on un-selving, and confusions between

sentient and non-sentient things. Bombs become “enquiring” and “pictures” in the back of the mind have no identity, no shape or form, and the self cannot be oriented in space and time. In Sansom’s firescapes, the human being is just one element amid a chaos of element and the mind has no power to classify or control.

It is natural to make the jump to the cosmopolitan pretensions in *Fireman Flower* and cognate elements in surrealism. David Gascoyne argues that surrealism “is an activity of the mind, and cannot be limited to any one particular time or place” (131). Sansom, like the surrealists, constructs an uncannily cosmopolitan art. Not only does he re-purpose passages from a Czech Jew writing in German who was then translated into English by two Scots—and who hovers behind *Fireman Flower* like a shadow or a double; Sansom and the surrealists emphasize “detachment from local cultures and the interests of the nation” as well as the rational side of the individual (Walkowitz 15-17). Unlike Joyce, Hemingway, Stein, and others, who paraded their “multiple attachments” in the manner of “international modernism” and promulgate mythic identities and highly original, less transmissible styles, Sansom uses what he calls the “unfussy, clear, sinuous prose” of Kafka’s fables to attempt to universalize through anonymity and distortion—functioning as a counterbalance to an era that saw the rise of the documentary film and mass surveillance (Walkowitz 15).

The unconscious self, the animal, the creature, and the monster all serve to deterritorialize the human mind and body from humanistic discourses of “revelation and religious authority,” of phylogenetic sanitizations and narcissisms; the surrealists in this chapter view the nonhuman, atavistic, and irrational repressions of the human species as crucial elements of Kafka’s challenge to “the nature of thought itself” (Wolfe xvi). The cosmopolitan drive to “imagine the stranger”

and the stranger within oneself, to problematize ethical and epistemological orthodoxies, dovetails with the neo-modernist drive to reimagine, scramble, and warp outmoded frameworks of aesthetic practice (Gilroy 78). Kafka's role as a "thunderhead" of this movement should be taken more seriously since he provided a channel through which groups of better-known and lesser-known surrealists could articulate their frustrations with realism, naturalism, and even less radical forms of romanticism.

## CHAPTER V

### American Prose/Poetry: Schwartz, Berryman, Bishop, and Plath

#### I. Delmore Schwartz's Versifications

Delmore Schwartz was the apple of American poetry's eye in the late 1930s and early 1940s. For many years he had a rocky but close friendship with John Berryman, W.H. Auden, Saul Bellow, Philip Rahv, James Laughlin, Allen Tate, Isaac Rosenfeld, Robert Lowell, and many others in the *Partisan Review* and *New Directions* circles, and his work was often compared to Kafka's in those journals. The consensus is that his poetry began to decline around the time that he took a major editorial position at the *Partisan Review* in 1943, where he worked (or overworked himself) for the next twelve years. Eventually succumbing to alcoholism, narcotic addiction, and mental disorder, he died in a seedy New York hotel at the age of 52, alone, childless, and practically friendless—his friendships and romantic relationships souring due to the stresses of mounting poverty, illness, and professional jealousy.

Schwartz came from a stock of what he called "Atlantic Jews" but deemed his poetry less as a deep articulation of, or a grappling with, his Jewish identity (like it was, say, for his poet friend Marya Zaturenska), but rather an outgrowth of the "international" and "transplanted" modernism of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce ("The Vocation of the Poet in the Modern World" 228-230). As in Clement Greenberg and Leslie Fielder's formulations, in which Schwartz, Isaac

Rosenfeld, Paul Goodman, and Saul Bellow are often mentioned, “Jewishness [is] a condition of the Artist,” the “noblest metaphor for the outsider,” for this generation of (often Jewish) late moderns (“The State of Writing” 872). This isn’t to say that Schwartz wasn’t sensitive to the Jewish predicament and the consequences of the Holocaust or didn’t have cutting explorations of Jewish selfhood and cultural distinctness in his art, but that this was not his dominant creative angle. Jewishness for Schwartz, as for Kafka, was a vexed subject, often cropping up in his work in indirect ways (the word “Jew” never appears in any of Kafka’s fiction) (*No! In Thunder* 224). In one of his late poems, “Surat’s Sunday Afternoon along the Sine,” Schwartz quotes and tinkers with a passage from Kafka’s diaries (one of the very last passages before his death) in order to express this vexed estrangement from tradition. The speaker hears “the voice of Kafka,” who, “forever sad, in despair’s sickness” proclaims:

Without forebears, without marriage, without heirs,  
Yet with a wild longing for forbears, marriage, and heirs:  
They all stretch out their hands to me: but they are too far away!” (*Selected Poems* 196)

Much like Kafka himself and Kafka’s kitten-lamb-dog-human “Crossbreed,” which has “no blood relation” and “no children,” Schwartz echoes Kafka’s melancholic unmooring from community, cultural heritage, and erotic fulfillment (“Vocation” 231). As Anatole Broyard, a friend of Schwartz, writes in his memoir of the pre-Beat literary scene in New York, *Kafka Was the Rage*, “Delmore, the typical New York intellectual of the forties, seemed to have lost the world itself. It was as if [he and other writers of his generation] had been blinded by reading” (Broyard 111). Severed from the commonplace rhythms of life, it’s no surprise that



Schwartz's politics—like the politics of the other leading figures in this chapter—enter into his poetry and critical writings in minor ways, with a vague leftist pacifism occasionally rising the surface (Atlas 100). His interests were primarily aesthetic, his poems densely allusive and more involved with literary than social history.

Despite his passion for Joyce, Schwartz thought “that literal imitation or extension” of his modernist icon “undesirable,” delicately critiquing Joyce’s “infatuation with everything Irish” and implicit nationalist fixation and turning away from his elaborate stylistic gymnastics (“Vocation” 231). Kafka’s writing, however, offered a different set of adaptive options. Joyce is a figure of canonical exile for Schwartz, a past master, while Kafka is a figure of something different, a site of textual, cultural, and ideological vagrancy, iconoclasm, and contemporaneity and therefore more malleable to Schwartz’s needs. Cosmopolitanism, as we are using it here, in its second sense—not as imitative performance, but as an ethical position—is an in-between stage, either expressed in moments of political transition and crisis or, in Schwartz’s case, as a long-term ideological skepticism that mobilizes the fable genre to express overwhelming feelings of uncertainty. Kafka, despite the presentist trend branding him a thorough leftist, was music to the ears of ideological skeptics who distrusted the exclusivity of the family, the party, the race, the nation.

Schwartz was a prolific writer and practitioner of multiple genres of writing. He penned poetry, fiction, hybrid prose poems, essays, and kept vast diaries. His multi-generic talents first debuted in the collection *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (1938), which was Schwartz’s first great success—the eponymous story proving one of Auden’s favorite pieces of the thirties.

Critics like Irving Howe perceived “Kafka-like accents” of Freudian anxiety and death

compulsion at the heart of “In Dreams” (Howe 226). But there are far richer examples of Schwartz’s engagement with Kafka in stories that fall to the wayside of critical attention and esteem.

In 1938 Delmore was reading *The Great Wall of China* collection and in 1943 he implored W.H. Auden to return his copy since he couldn’t find another “anywhere in Cambridge [Massachusetts]” (*Letters* 108). Throughout the next 15 years, Schwartz experimented with and rewrote the fables in this collection, in prose, poetry, or a combination of the two. In diary entries as early as 1944, Schwartz speculated in prose and poetry about writing a comically grotesque “Kafka story,” about a “. . . man who lived on islands / And had big feet” (*Journals* 205). This is framed as a fictional narrative and then qualified by, or extrapolated as, a poetic couplet about a Robinson Crusoe-like outsider (a figure Kafka was fascinated by). The first instance of rewriting that goes beyond notes about future intentions or mere allusion comes in the early forties, when Schwartz started writing a *Bildungsroman* that was eventually distilled into the long short story “The World Is a Wedding” (1948). This story deals with the establishment and dissolution of a tight circle of friends who orbit around one talented yet unsuccessful playwright (a thinly-veiled portrait of Paul Goodman and his circle) (Atlas xiv). It’s a surgical exploration of failure, literary pretension, and the hollowness of friendship. The swift process of disintegration begins in the final chapter, when, the day before the departure of the failed “genius,” Rudyard, the group’s centerpiece—who has accepted a less-than-ideal job teaching drama at a girl’s school in Cleveland—the friends throw a going away party. Of all things, a discussion about Kafka exposes the bitter feelings that have been multiplying in secret

over the years and forms the climax of the story. After too much wine, Rudyard's sister, Laura, proclaims:

“Five years ago, just about the time when we all began to see each other...I read a story by Rilke. I think it was Rilke. It was just a very short story. It was just a page and a half, and it may have been less. It was very good. I don't remember all of it, but what I remember was very good. The story is about wandering Siberians. They are hunters and they hunt wild cows on the Siberian steppes or tundras, or something. Anyway, they hunt for wild cows... And when the poor cow is bleeding to death, the hunter lays down on one side of the cow and chews big pieces of meat from the side of the cow. This is just like many other stories so far. The different part is that on the other side of the cow, the horse also lays down and chews out big pieces of meat.”

“The story,” said Rudyard, “is by Kafka, not Rilke, and you have distorted it.” (*In Dreams* 97)

Rudyard then takes the volume, presumably Kafka's *The Great Wall of China*, from the shelf and corrects a series of details from Laura's story. First, he quotes from the original text, Kafka's fable “An Old Manuscript”: “Their horses live on meat. Often a rider lies down beside his horse. Then both feed on the same piece of meat.” He proceeds to tell her that the story is “about nomads, not Siberians” and that there is nothing “about eating living cows who are bleeding to death.” Rudyard concludes:

“You have changed the story in a way familiar to me because I know how your memory distorts many things, making what has happened more brutal and more cruel than it was in actual fact.”

“Never mind,” said Laura. “Let's say that I wrote the story then. I wrote the story from my knowledge of life. But I am the cow, and you,” she said pointing at Rudyard, “are the nomad, the Siberian, and you,” she said, pointing to the other boys, “are the horses, chewing on the other side.” (98)

After Laura's performance of a revised, personalized version of Kafka's "very short" story and Rudyard's rebuttal, in which lurking nonhuman elements within the human (and vice versa) and interspecies violence are used to deconstruct the group's facades, accusations and exposures ensue, as well as a philosophical discussion (much to Laura's chagrin, who is sick of the highbrow talk and "literary allusions") about whether the world is a "wedding" or a "funeral"— Laura pessimistically settling, unlike the other "boys," on the latter in the story's last paragraph (103). Everything hinges on this moment when Laura, representing herself as sacrificial victim, harnesses Kafka's "An Old Manuscript" as a conceit for the way in which her brother and their mutual friends exploit her life and the space of her apartment, where the group meets regularly and Rudyard has lived for many years without a job. On the one hand, Schwartz parodies the less academic side of the New York Kafka cult, with its vague knowledge of the actual texts and casual confusion between German-language modernist writers. Yet it's no accident, no mere laziness on Laura's part, that the poet-novelist Rilke is mistaken for Kafka since these two German writers were, above others, enduring favorites and creative models (unlike Brecht, whose following, due to his communist sympathies, was intermittent and fraught) for Anglo-American literati and the Auden circle, of which Schwartz was a member. Both Rilke and Kafka privileged the animal or nonhuman as a site of corporeal and psychological investigation in their critiques of humanist discourse. Both wrote highly conceptual "prose poems" of extreme brevity isolating the animal as a subject of critique. Rilke, however, tends to articulate a "romantic ecology of affirmation and creative renewal" and subtle natural theology that is at odds with Kafka's "dark ecology," "in which the subliminal connectivity of the human with nonhuman life

gains an uncanny, grotesque, and sinister urgency, which society fears and denies” (Zapf 132). The fable, and Kafka’s re-engagement with it, does not hypothesize about the animal’s interiority in the manner of Rilke; animal subjectivity is directly imagined and inscribed through narrative performances. Kafka does not, with a patently exterior human gaze, visualize ‘images plunging into [animal] hearts’, as Rilke does, but breaks the bridge between subject and object, using “the irruption of the animal on the otherwise human body” and corporeal violence as conduits and menaces to knowledge (Seitler 6).<sup>10</sup>

Rudyard’s pedantic insistence on the letter of Kafka’s text is beside the point, and highlights his intellectual flaws, since the vaguely eastern nomad, Siberian or no, wandering on the outskirts of an empire, and necessitating (in one case) the building of the Great Wall of China, is a recurring element in Kafka’s imaginary; the alien, the stranger, the wandering exile without a community, in an endless cycle of gaining and losing ground on a desired territory is a flexible motif for Laura. Moreover, tribal, collective, or national markers are irrelevant to the semantic openness of the fable, since specific geographies almost never intrude into the prototypical ancient and modern fabulist narrative. A suddenly estranged view of the group’s accepted rituals and behaviors prepares the ground for an extended conceit which she claims as her own, as a story she wrote “from [her] own knowledge of life” (98). In Schwartz’s story, the taboo against literary theft and repurposing is attacked head-on as Kafka’s adaptable storytelling proves amenable for self-expression. While her little allegory has a key, and its referents (the various group members) are explained, the clash of source text and imitative text, and the

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<sup>10</sup> See Rilke’s “The Panther,” “The Gazelle,” “Black Cat,” and “The First Elegy” in *Duino Elegies*.

different perspectives on the material which is being worked (Rudyard's 'corrections' of Laura), create a jumble of opposing narrative layers.

In "An Old Manuscript," Kafka's nomads, "who communicate with each other much as jackdaws do," eat some anonymous kind of meat side by side with their horses; but the nomads also, in the following paragraph, "leap from all sides" onto a live ox and devour it, "lying overcome around the remains of the carcass like drunkards around a wine cask" (456). This passage overlaps with Laura's story of the bleeding cow that is eaten alive, proving that her "more brutal" version that emphasizes the grotesque and extremes of cruelty is actually more faithful to the details of "An Old Manuscript" than Rudyard asserts. For Kafka's creatures, unlike Rilke's panthers, gazelles, and "knowing animals [that] are aware / that [humans] are not really at home in the interpreted world," the shifting and vanishing lines between the human and nonhuman is always shaded with transgression (Rilke 151). This is the crux of Kafka's fable for Laura as it applies to her own life—by figuring herself as a cow, eaten alive, 'unnaturally', under no ritual conditions or phylogenetic conventions, there is a de-centering of the ideology of 'naturalness' (a word which the friends invoke multiple times in the text). Kafka's original is different from "other stories so far" because human hunter and horse are collaborators in transgression.

Laura is scandalized by the vapid truisms and speeches that follow from the friends, aiming to restore order to the party—speeches about anger and anxiety forcing relationships out of "their right place." The lonely Laura, deprived of her utmost wish, a husband, insists that "the world is a misalliance" (101). A fracturing of conventions (interpersonal customs, accepted life-wisdom) through an exposure to the creaturely, the violence and randomness of other modes of

being, as gleaned from Kafka, helps Laura articulate her frustration with amicable masks. An alliance of nomads and horses eating a living, bleeding cow proves a viable and personal metaphor for her state of vulnerability and searing insight into the mechanics of the group's performances (which is primarily composed of males and permeated by dogma). Through Kafka, she achieves a critical estrangement that gives her a "way out" of the discourse of organic friendship. The "natural attitude" that Laura displays at the beginning of the story towards Rudyard's "genius" and "natural" profession is turned upside down by the perspective of alterity.

William Butler Yeats famously reformatted and versified a passage from Walter Pater's "Leonardo Da Vinci" chapter in the *Renaissance* for the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936), which Yeats deemed a poem rather than a lyrical instance of "gem-like" prose (Pater 91-2). Schwartz does something similar to three Kafka fables, "Poseidon," "The Hunter Gracchus," and "The Silence of the Sirens," wherein he interrogates mythic narrative and ironically braids ancient and modern temporal registers. The brevity and density of Kafka's fables enabled writers of poetry to smoothly adapt his prose to new formal arrangements. Schwartz spent considerable time in his journals poetically adapting some of Kafka's texts. His journal writing started in 1939, not long after the publication of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* and persisted, sometimes with great seriousness and attention and sometimes in spurts, for the next twenty years. His ex-wife and editor, Elizabeth Pollett, has this to say about his journaling process:

He begins the journal conscious of it as a literary form and therefore conscious of a potential audience. But the focus and coherence this implies is not sustained. He gives

various reasons at various times for writing it. I think the most important is that it became part of the process of writing...[t]he journal shows many beginnings. (*Journals* ix)

Schwartz's Kafka rewritings are in some cases mere beginnings, in others complete in a provisional and fragmentary sense, reaching a conclusion but still quite raw. His journal was a field for experiment, for finding a way into certain styles and subjects, a process for determining what clicked with his inner sense of aesthetic rightness and what missed the mark. They are private, unofficial explorations.

In 1951, Schwartz writes in his journal, summarizing and versifying Kafka's "Poseidon" thus:

Kafka's Poseidon in PARABLES does not have any time for himself (hardly has a chance to see the sea)—he is involved in "endless work—since he took the job, he would in the end go over all the figures & calculations himself"—he was irritated that he was said to be "always riding about through the tides with his trident while all the while he sat here in the depths, doing figures uninterruptedly"—i.e., even a god has no time to enjoy himself, no freedom from his post or station.

Poseidon became bored with the sea  
He let fall his trident  
Silently he sat on the rocky coast  
And a gull, dazed by his presence—  
Described wavering circles around  
His troubled head (369)

In the original text, Kafka deliberately resurfaces the "cosmic" element of Poseidon's position, reminding the reader of the god's boundedness to, and estrangement from, the "world's ocean" as well as his eschatological daydreams in which he can, at "the end of the world," finally (however briefly) "make a quick little tour" of the ocean he allegedly administrates—but only after the



“last accounts” have been “gone through” and his duties are rendered defunct. Schwartz’s collaboration with Kafka’s text(s) is more complex than one might think upon a casual read, especially in light of the little poem that is an addendum or postscript to the story’s summary. This portion of the text comes from Kafka’s diaries and is not adapted from the Muirs’ translation of the story; Schwartz splices these two versions of the story together, enhancing the fabulist qualities of the “complete” story printed in the *Great Wall* collection. In his poem, Kafka and Schwartz reimagine Poseidon at the end of his career, possibly at the apocalypse. The god has shored himself on land, on the liminal coast, no longer in the ocean’s depths but within sight of the sea. He relinquishes his symbol of power and authority, the magical trident. Even the happy, consoling fantasy in Kafka’s “complete” version of “Poseidon,” about a little tour at the end of all things turns out to be empty of charm as the god becomes “bored” with the sea, sitting silent, alone, melancholic--boredom being, according to Agamben and Heidegger, “the mood where human and animal life enter into an uncanny proximity” (Santner 22). Introduced to the scene is a cosmopolitan animal (in the ecological sense) if there ever was one—a gull—who recognizes Poseidon’s pedigree. The gull singles out the god by “describing circles” around his troubled head, marking him as an alienated miracle, a being without telos and—quite possibly—even prey. The carnivorous or god-eating bird appears, for instance, in Kafka’s “Prometheus”—a story which Schwartz records reading in his diaries around the same time—where the mythical eagles ‘tear’ and “feed on [the god’s] liver,” forget him, and then grow “weary of the meaningless affair” (382). The legend is rendered “inexplicable” and purveys no knowledge. In a similar instance, the vulture in Kafka’s “The Vulture” hacks at the narrator’s feet and then “circled several times restlessly around [him]” before returning to gore him and eventually dive,

javelin-like, into his mouth, ‘drowning in his blood’. Kafka’s “Poseidon” and “The Vulture” were companion pieces, too, appearing side by side in *New Directions 9* (1946). It’s not a stretch to imagine that the deity in Schwartz’s poetic rewriting is further reduced to wounded quarry, a being out of its ‘natural’ element. This shadow of violence smacks of the tragedy of fable. As an obsolete administrator, Poseidon is much like Nietzsche’s last man and Judeo-Christian god, who must be sacrificed (along with the myths they represent) at the altar of new iterations of the human.

Like William Sansom, Schwartz found the incipit of “The Hunter Gracchus” generative; he writes in his journal:

Last night I did not understand Kafka’s “The Hunter Gracchus”—

Two boys were playing dice  
    a man was reading a newspaper,  
(on the steps of the monument, resting in the shadow  
of a hero who flourished his sword on high)  
A girl was filling her bucket at the fountain  
A fruitseller was lying by his scales  
    staring out to sea  
Two men in the back of the cafe were drinking wine  
(The proprietor was sitting at the table, dozing) (373)

He condenses the opening of the Muirs’ translation of the text:

Two boys were sitting on the harbor wall playing with dice. A man was reading a newspaper on the steps of the monument, resting in the shadow of a hero who was flourishing his sword on high). A girl was filling her bucket at the fountain. A fruit-seller was lying beside his scales, staring out to sea. Through the vacant window and door openings of a cafe one could see two men quite at the back drinking their wine. (*GWC* 205).

Schwartz leaves off just before the bark of the eternally wandering, half-dead Hunter Gracchus makes its appearance. He rewrites the opening, chops it up, and versifies it in order to clarify the story's meaning, to isolate sentences for better close reading, sentences which he "did not understand." Allen Tate writes in a contemporary journal that the "opening scene shows the world of men at their various occupations... The architecture of this setting reminds one of the allegorical paintings of the fourteenth century" (Tate 288). Schwartz's and Sansom's fascination with this opening is curious, on the one hand, since it does not foreground the enigmatic Hunter Gracchus, his liminal condition, or his relationship with the cock-sized Doves who are his correspondents and emissaries. They instead focus on the melancholic fragmentariness of the scene that Benjamin describes in his analysis of Albrecht Dürer's allegorical painting *Melencolia I* (1514). In the context of Kafka's aesthetic predilections, this scene stands out as disruptive, a kind of aberration, with its series of disconnected images wherein a community is non-interactive and suffused with boredom. But it's possible that the figure of the Hunter Gracchus was less appealing to the two writers, since critics of the day, such as Allen Tate, conflated him with the figure of Christ, whose "passion [is] continuously enacted." If this be the case, the opening scene turns out to be more disruptive and "impure" than a Hunter symbolically representing a "scheme of redemption" (Tate 288).

On the whole, though, the passages in Schwartz's diaries that rewrite Kafka's texts attest to his preoccupation with Kafka's bestiary. On the same day as his "Poseidon" summary and poetic extrapolation, he versifies—much more conservatively—elements of Kafka's "Silence of the Sirens" (370). This revision of the creature-myth of the Sirens, exploring the problem (and even the virtues) of misinterpretation, proved to be important poetic inspiration and site of

rewriting for other poets of the day, too, such as the Pulitzer Prize winner Marya Zaturenska. Schwartz also summarizes “The New Advocate,” the story of Alexander the Great’s warhorse turned into a sedentary and modern-day lawyer and bookworm of legal tomes, interpreting the story, and Kafka’s “narrative movement,” “as the examination of impossibility—or hopelessness—or unattainability” (370). The anthropomorphic horse Bucephalus is the only relic of a violent and ambitious mythic past. “Noting an interpretation by Werner Kraft, who apparently saw in this text the most powerful and penetrating critique of myth ever offered in literature, a critique marshaled, ultimately, in the name of justice, Benjamin writes...The law which is studied but no longer practiced is the gate to justice” (Santner 92). This paradox would have appealed to Schwartz, who was convinced that the “genius” of the intellectual and creative enterprise were at odds “with the knowledge of political reality” (“The Fabulous Example of Andre Gide” 462).

The epistemological roadblock represented by the atavistic animal, the collision of ancient and modern, and the impossibility of ethical or divine resolution haunted Schwartz throughout his private and public writings. Kafkan fabulism offered him an oblique angle of critique; he could toggle between the personal and impersonal, the historical and the hermetic, and engage with different generic traditions that fell outside of the purviews of the modernist writers who were both essential to his aesthetic origin story and catalysts of deep anxiety and insecurity. Kafka was a non-threatening modernist since he played the part of a belated contemporary, an enigma mediated through translation. None of Schwartz’s staple cultural heroes in English dealt so thoroughly with the nonhuman as both a psychological mirror and lamp. Through Kafka, he was able to strike a titillating middle ground between paleo- and neo-modernism, between mythic realism and subversive fabulism.

## II. John Berryman's Apocryphal Imitations

John Berryman eulogized Delmore Schwartz's tragic life in a dozen of his *Dream Songs*. His friendship with Schwartz broke down gradually over time as the latter succumbed to alcoholism, ferocious jealousy, and mental disorder. In Dream Song 147 Berryman writes: "Delmore, Delmore. / He flung to pieces and they hit the floor" and asks amid the throes of pain in song 149: "Can Delmore die?" Mourning the "young & gift strong" poet that Schwartz once was, he exclaims in another song "let's all be Jews bereft" (166-8, 170). Berryman, a non-Jew, construes Judaism in more or less the same universalist terms as Schwartz. Kafka's *K* is alluded to in Berryman's 1948 short story "The Imaginary Jew," in which the narrator is mistaken for a Jew and concludes, on a note signaling the essential symbiosis of artist and Jew—both victims and quarryies "hunted down" by gentiles and the bourgeoisie: "I was a Jew...the real image and the imaginary blood flow down together" (Levinson 252-5; "Imaginary Jew" 1945). Berryman was especially fascinated by Franz Kafka, 'bereft' before the Holocaust (although all his sisters later died in prison camps) and largely neglected by the majority of his fellow German language speakers and writers.

John Berryman was, like his friend, very much a connoisseur of Kafka's fiction and proved a cleric in what he called the "amazing cults...of Kafka and Kierkegaard" ("The State of American Writing" 860). He, along with Sylvia Plath, whom we will turn to in the next section, is an example of a confessional poet who saw Kafka as a useful prototype of the rejected and harried Jewish or cosmopolitan artist, as a leftover of capitalism and the international war

machine. He was, however, also attracted to Kafka's "positive qualities," if one might term them such; that is, the elements of Kafka's prose that challenged aesthetic conventions and provided writers with a new set of tools with which to experiment—in particular, the fable and the various thematic clusters we've already seen in this project: the human-nonhuman hybrid, violence and sacrifice as conduits to fraught or negative epiphanies, the co-operation of atavism and modernism, and a cosmopolitan distaste for nationally or geo-politically situated settings (Levinson 253). Berryman also expressed cosmopolitanism in the alternate sense used in this study: he imitated the writings of Kafka and recast his prose in poetic form, extensively plugging into the language of the stranger (or strangers) and simultaneously imagining the other (in this case animals and man-machines), opening the mind to grey, anxious, interrogative seams as part of an early post-humanist discourse in which Kafka played a notable role.

Berryman owned eleven books by the Kafka, Gustav Janouch's *Conversations* forming an apocryphal twelfth (Kelly 195-7). He was an early bird on the Kafka scene and read the 1933 edition of *The Great Wall* before many of his American peers, thanks to the fact that he was living in England, where the story collection was first published, from 1936-38 while studying at Cambridge. Long before Berryman had discovered the lithe candor of his *77 Dream Songs* (1964), he was consuming books, writing and imitating other modernists, and otherwise discovering his literary vocation as a precocious undergraduate. On 7 March 1938, he wrote to his mother:

I've written a number of poems recently but nothing else so interesting as the piece I enclose. I hope you like it, I think it brilliant. It takes the place, formally, of a story Kafka didn't write. I'm glad you and Bob like him, by the way; you are right, "The Burrow" is a

masterpiece. I had an interesting talk with [Edwin] Muir, his translator, at tea recently, he is at work now on the rendering of *America*, the third long allegorical novel Kafka wrote. I have *The Castle* and *The Trial*... Even in translation, I should think Kafka's prose and fictional method would be as good a model as one can find; why don't you and Bob study him, even imitate him for a bit, as you write, which I'm delighted to hear you're doing. (Kelly 120)

Richard Kelly speculates that the poem Berryman wrote at this time that "takes the place, formally, of a story Kafka didn't write" is a piece called "Prague," but it is much more likely the 1938 poem "Night and the City," which will occupy us presently (121). "Prague" references Kafka's hometown, of course, but has no 'formal' and only tenuous thematic elements in common with Kafka's fiction. "Prague" inevitably carries the shadow of Kafka, but was clearly written after Berryman's March 1938 letter since it addresses the Nazi occupation of the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia (and is therefore misdated) that occurred on 15 March, 1939, and Hitler's annexationist proclamations at Prague Castle. A section of the poem runs: "Which guns so rapidly can conjure men? / German. / What symbol justifies this consternation? / Nation. / Will the Leader do anything to charm them? / Arm them..." Berryman's critique of wolfish imperialist nationalism is the butt of the poem but it is a far cry from an effort at imitation. The encomiums Berryman and his mother bestow on "The Burrow," one of the animal stories in *The Great Wall*, following the anxious meditations of a burrowing mole-man, are echoed by other late modernists; about ten years later Tennessee Williams would write to James Laughlin, the editor of *New Directions*, that he was "becoming infected with [his] passion for Kafka, since reading "The Burrow" (*Selected Letters* 93). Again, we encounter an emphasis on the electric charge of the animal fables and "thought stories" for late modernists, an emphasis that's gone almost entirely unnoticed. Berryman describes Kafka's novels as "allegorical" after

having tea with Edwin Muir, signaling his interest in the mode. He advises his mother and step-father to “imitate” Kafka’s “fictional method” which is “a good model” “even in translation.” The cosmopolitan style of Kafka and the highly transmissible fabulist method render the problems of translation and intercultural transfer moot (Walkowitz 30).

“Night and the City,” a poem written before Berryman had charted his own poetic territory, is a kind of warm-up for the more explicit re-working of Kafka’s fiction in Berryman’s confessional *Sonnets to Chris* 73 “Demand me again what Kafka’s riddles mean” (1947). It is related to (though not synonymous with) what Jonathan Mayhew terms the genre of “apocryphal translation,” an “exploration of...negative space” in the guise of “translations of texts that *do not exist*” in the target language. This practice creates a “strong *illusion* of an original text” and is an act of reinvention, distortion, and “new poetic possibilities” (Mayhew xii). We might call Berryman’s practice apocryphal imitation instead of apocryphal translation. An imaginary Kafka story is formalized, smoothly rendered into poetic metrics—a move that is not surprising, since Kafka already so often operated in the miniature, the gnomic, in generic seams that made him conducive to poetic reception and rewriting. “Night and the City” originally appeared in 1940 in Berryman’s “Twenty Poems” section of *New Directions’ Five Young American Poets*, along with Randall Jarrell and others. It is the most enigmatic and atypical poem of the group that includes the Bruegel-inspired “Winter Landscape” and the ominous coming-of-war poems “Nineteen Thirty-Eight” and “The Curse.” “Night and the City” contains a strong current of apocalyptic anxiety, but was written (at least five days) before the Austrian Anschluss so is less absorbed in explicit continental affairs and less speculative than the poems he’d write later that year. Berryman, much like Schwartz, was a left-wing intellectual who flirted with Communism in the



“late thirties and early forties,” and was by no means an apolitical poet, but his commitments were marked with hesitations and caesuras (Cooper 80). “Night and the City” is certainly a caesura amongst the more topical poems in the collection. Some excerpts from the poem will give the reader a sharp sense of its pedigree:

Two men sat by a stone in what dim place  
Ravelled with flares, in darkness the could find,  
Considering death. The older man’s face  
Hollowed the hope out in the young man’s mind...

Political grammarians gave this  
Their scrupulous attention but they saw  
Terms dwindle from the eye and emphasis  
Whistle on the wind: they stared upon the law

While worms in books held carnival and ate  
And slept and spurred their nightmares to the post.  
Speechless murderous men abroad on great  
Thoroughfares found the virgin and the lost.

Night now was ever upon the world-city.  
Dogs struck as from inhuman dawn, they fled  
Down arrogant apartments to the sea  
And soon forgot among the swollen dead

Their genuine excitement when the rush  
And rack of their masters fell into dance  
Ignorant sleep but a skeleton hush,  
A sterile choreography for penance.

These they also discussed by the flat stone  
Where sacrifice had failed...

The barriers were down, they fell afraid  
On knees could not remember any smile  
For godhead, their teeth appeared and they prayed  
Desperate to eventual stars while

Technicians in high windows parried the dark.  
They blinked and said ‘Supreme predicament  
Justifies our despair, but the dogs bark.’ (*Collected Poems* 273)

“Night and the City” is a wonderful example of how the dual-impulse towards high modernism and anti-high modernism operates at the same time in the works of many late modernist writers. The poem is undoubtedly a fusion of “The Hollow Men” by T.S. Eliot—a writer to whom Berryman was devoted—along with the final chapter of Kafka’s *The Trial* and the essayistic and analytic style of stories like “Investigations of a Dog.” The nocturnal apocalyptic landscape, with its hollowness, nightmares, tumidity, rituals, stones, wind, and stars, is composed of a grab-bag of motifs from Eliot’s poem. The Kafka-esque elements overlap and deviate from this pattern; certainly the last episode in *The Trial* informs the mis-en-scene of the poem just as much. The phrase “speechless murderous men” alludes, perhaps, to the silent assassins who bring the lost K in the middle of the night, away from his anonymous, hermetic, and spatially paradoxical “world-city,” to the abandoned quarry, executing him (after a few moments of hesitation in which the sacrifice seems to have been botched) with a butcher knife on a broken piece of stone in an atavistic sacrifice. K. is stripped naked, and on his death-stone his body is made “inhuman,” dog-like, through an act of violence leading to a negative or ambiguous epiphany. The very last line of the novel suddenly and uncharacteristically integrates the creaturely: “Like a dog!” [K. said], it was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him” (Muir, 1935); the metaphorical dog transfers from Kafka’s novel into an active animal figure in “Night and the City,” reminiscent of “Investigations of a Dog,” with its dog-philosopher and ‘choreographed’ dancing dogs (*The Trial* 286). “The Hollow Men” also has its share of animal “disguises,” but

only as metaphors and exteriors (skins and masks); the nonhuman figures in Berryman's poem rather pose a vigorous challenge to human and divine law (i.e., the carnivalesque bookworms eating through, implicitly, the Law's text) (Eliot 77-80). Berryman's poem shifts back and forth between the apocalyptic scene of sacrifice and a skeptical critique of that very scene—a deconstruction of the own myth it is postulating, a markedly Kafkaesque move. In this return of the ancient or the repressed (the uncanny), the men forget human gesture (smiling), exuding rather an archaic expressive corporeality (the showing of teeth) while they pray to the stars rather than to the Judeo-Christian godhead in an act of pagan or druidic astro-theology. The 'political grammarians' and theological 'technicians' see their 'terms dwindle' and divine and human ethical coordinates scattered and challenged through a return of powerful animal signification.

In an "intense five- to seven-month period in 1947," John Berryman wrote over a hundred sonnets as a response to a fiery extramarital affair he was having with the wife of a graduate student while teaching at Princeton (303). Her code name is Chris. These sonnets marked a sea-change in Berryman's style and opened up a path to the candid, ironic, and self-deprecating voice he discovered in *Dream Songs*. His *Sonnets to Chris* weren't published until 1966, almost twenty years after their composition, due to their clear autobiographical references and the intense embarrassment they would have caused all parties involved. They reveal the first split between "the restrained, impersonal, academic poems" like "Night and the City" and the "frank and impassioned" voice of Berryman's later, more frequently published and anthologized achievements (Linebarger 67). Minus Berryman's juvenilia, these sonnets are arguably the least known and discussed of Berryman's poems. Written in the spirit of Petrarchan and

Shakespearean sonnet sequences, dwelling on the pangs, enchantments, and jealousies of a ravished lover, the sonnets nevertheless stretch and puncture the skin of the traditional sonnet form with their mixtures of high and low styles and salacious and sordid confessions. Imitation is a key element of the *Sonnet's* effect, since they, according to one Berryman scholar, “illustrate the process of creative imitation, in which old forms are deliberately shaped to new attitudes” (Weiser 388). Berryman was fascinated by acts of creative borrowing and plagiarism and defended Robert Lowell in *The New Yorker* from such charges (Lowell himself published a collection of poetic *Imitations* in 1958); echoing other modernists such as T.S. Eliot, “originality in poetry,” Berryman declares, involves “less in the invention of materials than in the subsuming of materials into a moving and fresh unity. The poet invents some of his materials, and others he takes where he finds them” (Mariani 190). His fondness for alchemic poetic production comes to a head in Sonnet 73 where he condenses and personalizes Kafka’s story “The Penal Colony.” Berryman composed this poem at a moment of personal and ethical crisis. Ritchie Robertson, incidentally, notes that Kafka originally wrote “The Penal Colony” at a similar moment of crisis, “in the months following the dissolution of his engagement [with Felice Bauer], in a scene which he described in his diary as a ‘tribunal’” (Robertson 20).

Some might object that “The Penal Colony” is not a proper animal story or fable in the sense that has been used here, since it’s a long short story that doesn’t seem to feature the interconnections between the human and nonhuman (although corporeal violence leading to an ethical and epistemological provocation is front and center). Yet Berryman’s rewriting of “In the Penal Colony” simply sifts the fabulist elements from a greater mass of paydirt and foregrounds the posthumanist—and specifically cyborgian—qualities of the original text. Kafka’s “painful”

story (as he described it) is about an officer obsessed by the intricacies of a machine of torture—called the apparatus—invented by the former god-like, polymathic Commandant of the penal colony. The apparatus, which is in danger of becoming obsolete and viewed as inhumane under a new regime, kills slowly, over a twelve-hour period, inscribing the convicted man’s sin on his body by means of a system of vibrating needles called the Harrow. The condemned are literally written to death. The machine-infatuated officer tries, with all his powers of eloquence, to convince a sojourning explorer of the apparatus’s beauty and inherent justness, demonstrating and explaining its incredible anatomical complexity. But when his efforts to claim an ally in the explorer fail, the officer strips naked and submits to the machine himself. The self-imposed execution goes awry, and the desired text “Be Just” is not inscribed on the officer’s body as the machine malfunctions and falls to pieces. In the final moment, a great iron spike drives through the officer’s head and Kafka writes that “no sign [is] visible [on his face] of the promised redemption” (190).

No one has noted in more than a few words how Kafka’s apparatus possesses cyborgian qualities; this is relevant to our discussion of Berryman’s sonnet, since he makes ample use of the cyborg effect. A cyborg, in Donna Haraway’s estimation, is a “hybrid of machine and organism,” and breaks down taxonomies and “antagonistic dualisms” like present/past, right/wrong, and god/man; such “imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (150, 176, 181). Kafka creates semi-cyborgian effects in “The Bucket Rider” and “The Bridge,” but “In the Penal Colony” is his most extensive interrogation of the man-machine boundary (a boundary that was also a deep

preoccupation of the Dadaists and Surrealists in Weimar Germany).<sup>11</sup> The apparatus, like a domesticated, overmastered, or abused creature, at first ‘obeys’ the officer at the slightest touch, but once the execution begins, and the officer’s body is integrated into its architecture, “the teeth of a cogwheel show...themselves” and the apparatus seems to sentiently “notice” its own process of dissolution (189). It fails to write a communicable message on the officer’s body and metamorphoses into a feral machine, penetrating, interweaving itself asemantically into the officer’s human body and both contributing to, and sharing in, its demise. This man-machine-corpse eludes “perfect communication” and rather displays a “powerful infidel heteroglossia” (176, 181).

Now that we’ve established some of the principal elements of Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” and some basic hermeneutic tools, we can better approach Berryman’s poetic rewriting in Sonnet 73:

Demand me again what Kafka’s riddles mean,  
For I am the penal colony’s prime scribe:  
From solitary, firing against the tribe  
Uncanny judgments ancient and unclean.  
I am the officer flat on my own machine,  
Priest of the one Law no despair can bribe,  
On whom the mort-prongs hover to inscribe  
‘I FELL IN LOVE’ .O none of this foreseen,  
Adulteries and divorces cold I judged  
And strapped the tramps flat. Now the harrow trembles  
Down, a strap snaps, I wave—out of control—  
To you to change the legend has not budged  
These years: make the machine grave on me (stumbles  
Someone to latch the strap) ‘I MET MY SOUL.’ (107)

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<sup>11</sup> See Biro, Matthew. *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (2009).

The riddle of Kafka's meaning, the challenge of the unanswerable question, is compounded by a poem combining an atavistic communal performance (a public execution) with a private present (secret adulteries only half-satisfying erotic needs, potential divorces, etc.), in addition to an amalgam of the Bible, Petrarch, and Kafka, in which the speaker plays multiple competing roles: scribe, officer, judge, priest, adulterer, lover, criminal, victim (as a sacrificial 'unclean' animal), and corporeal text. Atavism functions here "as a way to make visible, to exteriorize on the surface of the body, characteristics that might otherwise conceal themselves in the more undetectable realms of the body's interior spaces" (Seitler 6). The inner wound, the repressed or guilty history, transmutes into an indecipherable corporeal text (one that cannot be co-opted into a Freudian taxonomy of rationalizations and cures). An ethics of the cyborg is expressed through this multiplicity and "infidel heteroglossia."

The speaker's two desired messages conflict with one another; a shadow of irony is cast over his erotic and mystic proclamations ("I fell in love" and "I met my soul"), since we know, from Kafka's story, that after the officer is strapped down by the previously-condemned soldier, the out-of-control machine, which is the organ of communication for the speaker, breaks down and his body becomes a mere jumble of wounds. As one of the few critics to briefly address this poem makes clear: "The poet says that he 'met his soul' by engaging in the affair, but he does not mean he found fulfillment in it; rather, he discovered that he could trespass against the moral law in ways heretofore detestable to him" (Linebarger 67). Chris, his lover, is implicated in this fable of torture and moral aporia, since he implores her (seemingly playing the part of the explorer) to "change the legend" and use the machine as a kind of prosthetic scriptor to rewrite the story of their romance, to change it from one of ephemerality to platonic permanence. But

like Kafka's explorer, who decides he has "no right to obstruct the officer in anything," her intervention is rendered improbable and the end of the officer's/speaker's life, or the end of their romance, is heavily insinuated. Kafka's fabulism allows Berryman to rethink the aesthetics of pain and manipulate a traditional form to encompass the corporeal and epistemological violence that often erupts at the Kafka-esque human/nonhuman boundary, as well as the violence of the modern war machine.

### **III. Bishop and Plath's Fables**

Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath couldn't be more different on the surface. The one is restrained, diamond-sharp, a painter of images, the other explosive and fiercely autobiographical. Bishop was very much a member of the New York Intellectual group of poets and was friends or was acquainted with Delmore Schwartz, John Berryman, W.H. Auden, Philip Rahv, Stephen Spender, Saul Bellow, Randall Jarrell, Mark Van Doren, and, of course, her close friend Robert Lowell (one need only look at the photograph from the celebrated Gotham Book Mart party to see the majority of this group together). Plath came a half-generation after Bishop, but was a student of Robert Lowell and knew many members of the same circle during her short 30-year life. Both poets, however, were drawn to the Kafka fable at different moments in their careers. For the first time in this study, in the case of Bishop, we'll have to do a little (and only a little) more guesswork in terms of the experimental derivation of her animal fables; whereas with Plath, her engagement with Kafka in one particular short story is entirely explicit and crystal clear.



Robert Lowell, throughout his life, repeatedly draws a connective line between some of Bishop's stories, poems, and prose poems and the work of Kafka. In 1949 he writes a letter of admiration to Bishop about her story "In Prison," wondering if she had "read Kafka when [she] wrote it" (*Words in Air* 83). He reviewed *North & South* in 1947, writing that "one is reminded of Kafka and certain abstract paintings" ("Thomas, Bishop, and Williams" 20). While teaching at Boston College in 1960 (Plath had been one of his students that academic year), he informs Bishop that: "I gave my class your "Man-Moth," unidentified, last week, as an illustration of good description that also builds a new world like Kafka" (*Interviews* 55-6). This poem, which follows the nocturnal perambulations of a hybrid man-moth, Lowell deemed "as original as Kafka," providing him with an ideal model or touchstone for Bishop's poetry until the end of his life. Other critics view the poem as an "allusion to Gregor Samsa," an "exile from the city of men" (Kirsch 68). Marianne Moore, Bishop's primary poetic mentor, makes similar observations and Bishop herself views Kafka as someone, along with Marianne Moore, T.S. Eliot, and Paul Klee, who purveys "[t]hat strange kind of modesty that I think one feels in almost anything contemporary one really likes...modesty, care, SPACE, a sort of helplessness but determination at the same time" (*Words in Air* 250). For her, Kafka is a combination of a surrealist and abstract painter (movements to which she, a painter herself, was devoted) and existentialist philosopher, Kafka and his characters heroically exerting themselves in the face of a godless and issueless existence. Although there is a leftwing current in the depths of many of Bishop's poems, as many recent critics have argued, she was largely "ahistorical and apolitical," a "radical" who felt "uncomfortable in the presence of political commitment" (Axelrod 35). Her shifting views and

distrust of ideological extremes fits into the same pattern we've traced with Berryman and Schwartz.

The fable genre and allegorical style preoccupied Bishop, especially in the 1930s. Others have noted that Bishop utilized, during this period, parabolic “dark speech” and narrative “secrecy” (Lombardi 44-5). Bishop even uses the word fable on a few occasions, but like many of her contemporaries (although there are notable exceptions, like Horace Gregory and Nym Wales, among others, who use fable almost exactly how I'm using it), conflated fable, parable, and allegory—yet the violence, dark fantasy, and nonhuman polemics of this kind of miniature anti-realist and anti-epic writing inspired her and spurred her to a number of acts of composition. In a letter to Marianne Moore, she describes her story “In Prison” as “another one of those horrible ‘fable’ ideas that seem to obsess me” (31 January 1938, RM) (Lombardi 128). Above all, the prose poem “The Hanging of the Mouse” (1937) fits like a glove into the genre of Kafkaian fabulism, which, due to its ‘horribleness’ is dramatically different from her later, tamer, though nevertheless stunningly beautiful animal prose poems in the series “Rainy Season; Subtropics.” A space opens up between Bishop's elusive statements about Kafka, the uncanny similarities in her poetry, and the positive interpretations and lineages constructed by her close friends that makes it hard not to include Bishop as a participant in this late modernist fabulist movement.

For the most part, Bishop imitates a genre of writing rather than a specific text, though “In the Penal Colony” is directly signaled at key moments in “The Hanging of the Mouse.” The qualities of the Kafkaian fable are distilled into an abstract pattern that is nevertheless concentrated enough to evade the category of appropriation, which signals a “wholesale rethinking” of a text or group of texts and is a more “shadowy gesture” (Sanders 28, 32). “The Hanging of the

Mouse” is a prose story that’s always included in Bishop’s poetry collections and is therefore viewed as an experimental prose poem of about a page and a half’s length. In it, a condemned mouse is to be executed for a crime that is never quite clear, as in “The Penal Colony” and *The Trial*. The mouse’s fellow animals—beetles, a raccoon and his son, a praying mantis, a bull frog, and a cat and her child—either participate or observe the execution with mechanicalness, lassitude, or saccharine moral self-righteousness. None of them attempt to help the confused, frightened creature who is a cog in an enigmatic ceremony. In the end, the mouse is graphically hung to death, providing a “moral lesson” that is left ironically suspended. The fable reads like a dark, ambiguously allegorical version of *The Wind and the Willows*. At many points it overlaps quite directly with Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony.” The mouse:

...fell slightly forward, and when he was jerked in the right direction his feet became tangled together. The beetles, however, without even looking at him, each time lifted him quickly into the air for a second until his feet were untangled...[The raccoon executioner] was very fastidious and did everything just so. One of his young sons...waited on him with a small basin and a pitcher of water. First he washed his hands and rinsed them carefully; then he washed the rope and rinsed it. (*Poems* 166)

Compare, for example, the above passage to these from “In the Penal Colony”:

[The soldier] opened his eyes with a jerk, saw what the condemned man had dared to do, let his rifle fall, dug his heels into the ground, dragged his prisoner back so that he stumbled and fell immediately, and then stood looking down at him, watching him struggling and rattling in his chains. "Set him on his feet!" yelled the officer...and with the soldier's help got him up on his feet, which kept slithering from under him...[the officer] then went over to wash his hands in the water bucket, perceived too late that it was disgustingly dirty, was unhappy because he could not wash his hands, in the end thrust them into the sand. (173)

A few other critics have noted the “Kafkaesque” quality of this fable, but as we’ve seen with the other subjects of this study, the issue is never examined beyond a few brief statements (usually by just qualifying the prose poem with the adjective Kafkaesque) (Harrison 87). Like “In the Penal Colony,” Bishop’s story occurs in a hermetic no-place, in a geographical vacuum that is in line with fabulist universality. The brutal fascistic militarism of the beetles in Bishop’s story, and the officer in Kafka’s, parallel one another (unsurprisingly) in their insistence on sanitization and hygiene, in unsettling allusions to the discourse of eugenics. The mouse and the condemned man act as objects in a system of predators and predation (the mouse as the only herbivore and the condemned man as an oppressed native). Both, like refugees, Jews, or the marginalized countercultural artist, are excluded from rights granted by the law (think, for instance of the persecution of non-Jewish ‘degenerate’ artists like Max Ernst, Max Beckmann, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner). Both the mouse and the condemned man are subjected to violence in which their bodies are temporarily or permanently disabled. As in Flannery O’connor’s stories—who herself says she “learned something from Kafka”—violence and the grotesque function as epistemological shocks to customs and ways of life taken for granted. In her own way, Bishop, like Berryman, siphons posthumanist elements or implications from “In the Penal Colony” and uses them to explore the seams in her own poetics. A return to the animal in “The Hanging of the Mouse,” even the (inevitably) anthropomorphized animal, mimicking the same motions and rituals seen in Kafka’s story, emphasizes, among other things, the tensions between, and coequality of, instinct and reason—an area that Kafka, Freud, and Nietzsche all shared a philosophical common ground.

Sylvia Plath was a prolific fiction writer as well as a poet, although her short stories—over seventy in all, most of them unpublished and considered juvenilia or marginalia—have generally been neglected by Plath scholars in favor of her poems and autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*. While this evaluation is often justified, stories like “The Wishing Box” (1956) disentangle themselves from such relegations and are bold, self-sufficient pieces containing movements and passages as powerful as her strongest poetry. Much like Bishop, Plath’s politics are indirect, intermittent, Sandra Gilbert writing that Plath “did not have an explicitly political imagination” (Ferretter 90). Despite her deep engagement in “contemporary history and politics,” especially in her diaries, Plath stands back from an explicit ideological stance that precludes fluidity and provisionality (Ibid.).

Plath was no stranger to Kafka’s fiction. As for Berryman and Lowell, philosemitism played a major role in many of her poems, Jews acting as “symbolic figure[s] of support, for the emergence of confessional poetry in its most distinctive forms” (Levinson 244). Kafka as a figure of cultural marginality and literary iconoclast, as a practitioner of minor genres, fascinated Plath. Judith Kroll and Matthew Boswell detect that Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist” was a likely inspiration for Plath’s poem of resurrection after suicide—something for which she has a “call”—“Lady Lazarus.” Kroll maintains that “possibly this sideshow resurrection act of Lady Lazarus was inspired by the central character in Kafka’s story, “A Hunger Artist,” who practices “professional fasting” for a crowd of spectators (in an earlier version of the poem, Lady Lazarus likewise speaks of her “profession.”)” (154). Both Plath’s poem and Kafka’s story stage their

literal or figurative ‘dying arts’ in a cage in a circus environment, where they are subjected to voyeuristic objectifying gazes. In Kafka’s text, the hunger artist is merely “an impediment on the way to the menagerie” and is cleared out and replaced by a vigorous panther (308). It’s no accident that Plath is attracted to the bare corporeality of ‘flesh’, ‘bones’, ‘blood’, ‘eye pits’, and ‘teeth’ in “Lady Lazarus,” a corporeality that converges with the nonhuman in its elemental fragmentariness and visceral associations. Her story “The Wishing Box” engages with the humanimal body, too, as well as the animal dream, and quite explicitly through the incorporation of the Kafkan fable.

In 1957, Plath, determined to send a story or two to the Atlantic Monthly, writes in her diary:

two stories at least: The Eye Beam one: like Kafka, simply told, symbolic, yet very realistic. How one is always and irrevocably alone. The askew distortions of the private eye. Set in Cambridge [and a few days later writing]...the Eye-Beam story (Atlantic Monthly: weird, very Kafka symbolic: girl gets speck in eye for a week: world is put away far off, and she realizes the irrevocable nature of her own loneliness: relation to suitor). (*Journals* 276, 292)

One can only speculate that “The Wishing Box” (1956) is misdated by editors, or that Plath was intending to rewrite a story whose primary foundation she’d already laid, since “The Wishing Box” fits the description set out in her diary almost perfectly (*Johnny Panic* 213). In the story, a newlywed wife, Agnes, whose dream life is banal yet troubled and anxious, experiences extreme jealousy over the highly imaginative dreams of her accountant husband, Harold. A rift develops between them and Agnes grows increasingly aware of her own loneliness, which is compounded by a blurriness that develops in her eyes which distorts the world around her. The story,

unsurprisingly for Plath, ends in the protagonist committing suicide. It's hard not to recognize masked versions of the real-life Sylvia Plath and her poet husband Ted Hughes in the text's background.

Kafka is mentioned very early on in the story, along with two of his forebears in the fantastic tradition, William Blake and E.T.A Hoffman; after the husband relates a dream about William Blake, the narrator, or Agnes speaking or thinking indirectly, asserts that "Harold's dreams were nothing if not meticulous works of art. Undeniably, for a certified accountant with pronounced literary leanings (he read E.T. A. Hoffman, Kafka, and the astrological monthlies instead of the daily paper..." (*Johnny Panic* 214). Agnes is chafed by this dream life she does not share, populated with "fabulous legendary creatures in an exhilarating world from which Agnes found herself perpetually exiled" (214). Once Harold dreams of a red fox that is "grievously burnt, its fur charred black, bleeding from several wounds" that nevertheless returns "miraculously healed, with flourishing fur, to present Harold with a bottle of permanent black Quink" (215). Harold is "fond of his fox dreams," clearly connected to the writing life (the bottle of Quink ink), much like Ted Hughes, whose "Thought-Fox" (1957) is one of his most celebrated poems--fox motifs showing up often in Hughes' oeuvre which abounds with an impressively diverse bestiary (Hughes, incidentally, construes Kafka himself as a wounded hybrid in a 1967 poem: "[Kafka] is an owl / He is an owl, 'Man' tattooed in his armpit / Under the broken wing... / He is a man in hopeless feathers)" (*Collected Poems* 117). Earlier in the story, Harold tells Agnes of another dream, in which a "white leopard with gold spots was standing over this bright blue stream, its hind legs on one bank, its forelegs on the other, and a little trail of red ants was crossing the stream over the leopard, up its tail, along its back, between its eyes, and down on the

other side” (214). Agnes’ dream life, on the contrary, consists of “dark glowering landscapes peopled with ominous unrecognizable figures” that “would cause the most assiduous psychoanalyst to repress a yawn.” At one stage she “seriously considered hiding a copy of Freud’s writings on dreams in her closet and fortifying herself with a vicarious dream tale by which to hold Harold’s interest each morning” (216).

It’s unlikely such dreams of unrecognizable figures, of strangers in anonymous spaces (itself a feature of cosmopolitan fabulism), would make a psychoanalyst (such as Freud) yawn, but Harold’s animal dreams fit more into the Freudian paradigm, which typically requires interpretable subjects or objects. Freud, whom Kafka read and disliked, but could not entirely escape, is flagged on multiple occasions in Plath’s story. As an inveterate psychiatric patient, she was steeped in psychoanalytic lore and uses it quite carefully in the story—Kafka and Freud being braided together literally hundreds of times in the critical literature published before Plath’s story. Agnes’ lackluster dream and imaginative life devoid of animals or identifiable creatures—dreaming and imagining being explicitly equated in the story—catalyze anxieties about her own artistic impotence. But more importantly, the desire to read Freud in order to prepare for her dream-discussions with her husband is not unrelated to the specific fabulist and creaturely nature of Harold’s dreams. The dream-work, in Freud’s system, leads one back into a prehistory in which “the human psyche becomes indissociable from the sign of the animal” —“into the individual’s prehistory...[and] into phylogenetic prehistory, too” (Seitler 31). On multiple occasions, in *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, among many others, the instinctual “animal organism,” with his “ape-like prehistory,” is analyzed through the prism of animal dreams (*Civilization* 77, 87). Freud’s “Wolf-man,” “Rat-man,” horse phobias,



and other zoophobias are crucial case studies for his theories (Seitler 43). The violence of Harold's burnt, wounded fox, and frozen, bridge-like leopard (very reminiscent of Kafka's "The Bridge") over which ants strangely crawl, carry a series of interpretable signs that can help the neurotic come to terms with the prehistoric, the instinctual, and sexual desire. Agnes, whose dreamscape lacks animals and violent signatures, can lead to no epiphany, no psychiatric cure since the strictures placed upon her animality cannot be liberated, her link to the past cannot be rediscovered. This makes it no great surprise that she melts gradually into psychosis, ending her life with the aid of a box full of pills.

During the mid-to-late 50s, Plath plans other imitation pieces, writing in the "style" of Frank O'Connor and Ernest Hemingway from whom she "take[s] a lesson" (*Journals* 292). She tries "both styles" at the same time—"Kafka lit-mag serious" and "naturalistic" stories "avoiding sentimentality" like "Hemingway." This is a path late moderns often took—experimenting with the 'weirdness' of Kafka, the dark and unclassifiable fantastic, while at the same time experimenting with less radical aesthetics. They were often pulled in both directions, Hemingway standing as Kafka's foil in this flowering of imitative writing. But only in relation to Kafka does Plath engage in a stance in which "the world is put away far off, and she realizes the irrevocable nature of her own loneliness." There is no language of estrangement surrounding her imitative plans regarding Hemingway and O'Connor. Through the eyes of Kafka the world becomes an (hyper)object of critique, the stranger becomes primary, and one's "nature" is thoroughly examined. Her "Eye Beam" story is a gateway to a new perspective, permitting "askew distortions"—and this is why her foray into Kafkan fabulism is a peculiarly cosmopolitan exercise.

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Most scholars of intertextuality take it for granted that within the sphere of writing (versus adaptations to film, painting, music, etc.) the transfer of signifiers occurs between works in similar or related genres: novel to novel; poem to poem; short story to short story or short story to novel. But Kafka's fiction, and especially his short fiction, generated waves of intergeneric practice that explored the seams and symbiotic relationships between genres. Both his content and form jarred writers out of their comfort zones, fed into desires to write outside of the strictures of tradition, and whetted their receptivity to less-easily-classifiable creative performances. The nomadic qualities of Kafka's fables—their elusiveness that could not be ensnared in a concrete politico-theological position—magnetized them. This must have been surprising and provocative, since his allegorical style was not especially difficult to master and reproduce: the careful nominal and geographical occlusion and hermeticism that isn't a far cry from hermetic poetry but doesn't strive for the semantic dissonance of surrealist automatic writing. His visionary content, with its alchemical combinations, also dissolves conceptual boundaries in the manner of prophecy, which functions to critique, challenge, and rearrange; and this facet of his work, paired with his intergeneric fables/prose poems, set the originality of his enterprise in high relief.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Doggish Investigations of Goodman, Rosenfeld, and Bellow

#### I.

Paul Goodman, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Saul Bellow, three members of a group of Chicago and New York-based Jewish intellectuals contributing fiction and essays to the major periodicals of the day, and especially *Partisan Review*, were friends and rivals who sought to push writing into new directions. Along with Alfred Kazin, Karl Shapiro, Philip Rahv, H.J. Kaplan, and others, they were amongst a wave of “typically urban, second-generation Jews, chiefly ex-Stalinists, ambivalently intellectual but for all their anguish insolently at home with ideas and words” (*Prodigal Sons* 155). As Jews—and especially as alienated young Jews, standing apart from both their roots and the general society—they were in a unique position as commentators for the larger society. They were the outsiders who became ““the perfect insiders,” the perfect outsiders” (Ibid. 153). All of these writers gravitated towards Kafka as a model of ambivalent alterity in both his fiction and his life. In 1948 Leslie Fiedler wrote that “Kafka belongs particularly to us,” since Kafka, along with Sigmund Freud, was an artist-philosopher-Jew who represented “the noblest metaphor of the outsider” (*No! In Thunder* 99). Despite Kafka’s well-known exclamation “For the last time Psychology!” and his doubt about a system of rational maneuvers aimed at remedying a fundamentally incurable existential predicament, these New

York Intellectuals were passionate advocates of the “values of cosmopolitanism and critical thought” inherent in psychoanalysis and saw in Kafka, in the words of Philip Rahv, “a radical secularism” akin to the psychoanalytic project (Cooney 215).

Rahv, Goodman, Rosenfeld, and Bellow refused, unlike so many contemporaries, to read Kafka as a purely religious writer, construing his life and work as irreducible to any particular interpretive narrative—even the fairly strident Jewish explications promoted by Fiedler and Clement Greenberg that imagined Kafka’s parables as “the lost words of a Zaddik,” as evocative of “the Zohar,” or in the tradition of “the Amorites [and] the Tannaites” and therefore “uniquely Jewish” (*No! In Thunder* 99; Greenberg 99, 101). Like themselves, Kafka was an urban Jew torn by many competing identities and attachments. Kafka’s Jewishness and the body of his work was a metaphor for, and expression of, in Bellow’s words, the “*métèque* writer” or “outsider”—the “nonnative who, being on the fringe of a language and culture,” has a subversive and productive vantage point on the dominant culture and language; he is thus a prototype of “this cosmopolitan age” (“A Jewish Writer in America”). The life of a secular Jew offered a sometimes a limiting and angsty, but just as often a generative form of estrangement that embraced composite identities and cast the net of the Jewish situation over any ethnic, racial, or cultural other. W.H. Auden, who moved in and out of this New York Intellectual circle, linked the Jew and artist in “The Wandering Jew”; the cognateness of Jew and artist became a trope of the day. Isaac Rosenfeld states this position quite plainly in a 1944 essay entitled “The Situation of the Jewish Writer”:

But the position of Jewish writers—artists and intellectuals in general—is not entirely an unfortunate one. For the most part the young Jewish writers of today are the children of immigrants, and as such—not completely integrated in society and yet not wholly foreign to it—they enjoy a critical advantage over the life that surrounds them...Jews are marginal men. As marginal men, living in cities and coming from the middle classes, they are open to more influences than perhaps any other group. This position of cultural exposure gives the Jewish writer the advantage of access...the outsider often finds himself the perfect insider. (*Preserving the Hunger* 122)

Rosenfeld and Bellow, and W.H. Auden before them, equated “emancipated Jews” with artists of all stripes (123). Both groups belonged to “colonies of the spirit,” were “specialist[s] in alienation” and skeptics of rusty traditions and master narratives (Ibid.). In a 1947 review titled “Kafka and His Critics,” Rosenfeld expresses annoyance at the critics of the day who “neglect... the author’s significance as an artist,” full of riches and paradoxes, instead minimizing him or her to “a religious writer...a psychoneurotic or psychotic personality, an allegorist, a dream-writer, a Jew, a rationalist, irrationalist or anti-rationalist, a thorough though perhaps unwitting chronicler of the basic social conflicts of the time, etc. etc...” (166-7). Kafka’s Jewishness was one element of a vibrant multiplicity that issued from his minority position as a Jew in German-speaking Prague as well as a mind that was shaped by the multilayered artistic and intellectual inheritance bequeathed to him by world culture and that was not dominated by any coherent sense of self. Unlike most British and American writers in this study, however, these Jewish American writers articulated a living, embodied cosmopolitanism rather than ‘cosmopolitan fantasies’ or ambitions; Jewishness acted as a prism, opening themselves to a field of variety, shifting lenses, and a protean sense of self, spurring them to cull and mine material from present and past, center and periphery, modern urban environments and shtetl, new America and old Europe (Walkowitz 21).

## II. Paul Goodman's Anarchic Fabulism

This cosmopolitan openness and emphasis on the estranging and ideologically-shattering potential of art fed into the marginal and hitherto unexplored aspects of these writers' critical and creative practices. Paul Goodman's writing is a good place to start, since his scholarly essays and creative imitations of Kafka are extremely robust and explicit in their aims of deterritorializing the concept of the human. A few essays have been published and one unpublished dissertation has been written on Rosenfeld's connection to Kafka (ignoring, as always, his engagements with Kafka's animals), but not a single scholar has taken seriously or even recognized the contributions Goodman made, and the lines of flight he staked out, from the mid-century canon of Kafka criticism.

It's useful to start with Goodman's critical work before we turn to his essayistic fiction. Generally, Goodman's fiction and literary criticism are ignored in favor of his political essays—he was a noted figure in anarchist philosophy—along with his social criticism, especially *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (1960), which was a hit with the countercultural generation of the 60s. Astonishingly, Goodman produced the very first critical monograph on Kafka in the English language. His 1947 *Kafka's Prayer* preceded the much more widely-read and critically-acclaimed book *The Frozen Sea: A Study of Franz Kafka* by Charles Neider (1949), which gained more traction in the little magazines and journals of the day, such as *Partisan Review*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, and *Comparative Literature*. Sections from Goodman's monograph were published earlier, in 1946, in the "Preface" to the first English-

language edition of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, translated by A.L. Lloyd for *Vanguard Press*—the only Kafka story circulated at the time that was read predominantly in a translation not executed by Willa and Edwin Muir (even though Eugene Jolas had translated the story much earlier for *transition* in 1936). We will turn first to Goodman's "Preface" to this translation of *The Metamorphosis* as a primer to his longer critical interventions, since it contains much of the same content and is a major portal through which readers made first contact with Kafka's most famous short story.

Goodman's criticism was cut from a different cloth than critics informed by Calvinism, Kierkegaardian existentialism, or Hannah Arendt's political assessment of Kafka as a predictor of fascist bureaucratic practices. Philip Rahv—who blacklisted Goodman at *Partisan Review*—and the rest of his contemporaries dismissed Goodman's Kafka commentary as eccentric and off-the-mark, asserting that Goodman's monograph, and thus the "Preface" that contained much of the same material, was "utter confusion" ("Idiosyncratic Genius" 15). Rahv decried Goodman's "anarchic utopianism" that asserts that once unconscious repression is relaxed and "we undo the state...the good society will flourish"; Kafka's animal stories are mentioned in Rahv's review only to undermine Goodman's unique emphasis on them: "To assert, as Goodman does, that Kafka was "a believer in the totemic religions of the primitive hordes" and then to extract the meaning of his animal-stories, such as "Metamorphosis," "The Burrow," "Investigations of a Dog," etc., from this notion is to put the Freudian method to an illegitimate use" (Ibid.). Goodman does, at times, apply Freudian theory haphazardly and with private meanings that are difficult to decipher, but his synthesis of creaturely thinking and psychoanalysis was a new approach for the time, containing insights remarkably similar to ones made by Derrida and other

postmodernist theorists. The handful of critics to review Goodman's monograph have dismissed it outright: ignoring Goodman's disquisitions on the animal and echoing Rahv by writing that "Goodman's interpretations pile up like barnacles on a derelict ship, encrusting every inch of the text and finally dragging the romances under" (Stoehr 57). In fact, Goodman himself leaves his incredibly substantive comments about Kafka's short animal texts to the end of his study and devotes the rest of the book to less radical interpretations of the novels. Once again, a bifurcation appears even in the minds of Kafka's interpreters and rewriters, relegating the elements of the Kafkaesque that they found most imaginatively potent (whether they were aware of it or not) to the fringes of their public thinking.

Derrida, in "The Animal That Therefore I am," teaches us that:

There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of "living creatures" whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity... Among non-humans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general. From the outset there are animals and, let's say, l'animot. The confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority; it is also a crime. (Derrida 48)

Goodman has a similar insight in *Kafka's Prayer*, refusing to categorize 'the animal' as a monolithic concept, and considering Kafka's "bestiary" in its prismatic iterations: "the vermin, mice, jackals, moles, dogs, moths, burrowing beasts, and lamcats" (262). Goodman chastises critics for ignoring "Kafka's animals"; "these beasts," he writes, "are somehow similar to us; the critics then overlook the curious fact that he kept writing about animals. Why did he? Why these



particular animals? What is an animal for Kafka, and what is a man?"(xi). The problem of genre also feeds into these interventions in creaturely classification: "Fables," Goodman writes, "are stories in which animals act like men...Animal stories are stories in which they act as themselves. Kafka's beasts are handled in both these ways, but this is because he makes an identification of man and beast" (260). The beast is "the symbol of unconscious conflicts" and "an escape from [the adult's] ego into nature, freedom, and community" (261). He makes sure to point out that Kafka's characters are not "reduced" to animals, but they rather furnish "a release from moral delusions and a return to living ethics, both communal and self-regarding" (Ibid.). He equates Rotpeter's need for "a way out" with the forbidden desires and energies of the unconscious, which, when released or vindicated, in classic psychoanalytic fashion, will break the superego's pathological straightjacket. Goodman is one of the few interpreters to attempt an explanation for the reason why Kafka's creatures were such attractive subjects for so many mid-century writers (his monograph is just as much "a polemic and self-defense" as an "objective study" with a "critical apparatus") (xii). To his mind, these texts allow one to experiment with the overlapping boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious mind, the rational and the irrational, the past and present, the human and nonhuman, fiction and the essay, violating various conventions and categories while participating in a dialogue with the age of psychoanalysis, the "age of anxiety"; they ease the way to a rethinking the concept of the human, from a different angle than the existentialists and Hannah Arendt. Arendt, for example, interprets *The Castle* as the "drama of assimilation" and the plight of the "pariah," "shorn of political significance"; but Goodman and the New York Intellectuals in this chapter found in the animal a much more potent and universal expression of estrangement and disenfranchisement—a larger scale problem

between the human species and the entire spectrum of nonhuman species rather than strictly between Jew and gentile society or between the artist and philistine (“Jew as Pariah” 116, 121; Bakhtin 284, 294).

It should come as no surprise that no scholar has discussed Goodman’s Kafka imitations or noted how they connect to his forgotten yet highly original critical discussions of Kafka’s animal thinking. In *Kafka’s Prayer*, Goodman centralizes the idea of imitation to the reception and integration of a writer’s techniques and ideas into a new cultural habitat: “That as with other masters, on rereading and as the imitation of his manner establishes a climate of easier intelligibility, the writings of Kafka appear less and less strange and more and more the plain reality” (xii). Imagining the stranger, and “imagining oneself as a stranger,” is an inevitable process of attrition—the more one does so, or a group does so, the more the stranger’s words become acculturated, populated with alien meanings (Gilroy 78).

In his story “A Fire on Our Street,” Goodman includes a footnote that cites Kafka and Auden as innovators that paved the way for a “dissatisfaction with the limitations of narrative and the awkwardness of ideational lyric poetry.” “Both story-writers and poets have,” he goes on, “by the incorporation of symbols, arguments, etc., gravitated towards a kind of familiar essay with a stronger formal unity than that of the older rambling, more personal form. . . . a kind of dialectical lyric prose” (*The Facts of Life* 111). “Investigations of a Dog” was an especially important instance of this “dialectical lyric prose” for Goodman and he alludes to it in stories like “The Lear Complex.” In the latter story-essay, Goodman draws on Freud’s Oedipus complex, Nietzsche’s idea of resentment, and Darwinian natural selection in order to diagnose a pathology that sees strong adults submitting to the will of weak, helpless children and in old age becoming

psychologically and physically dependent on them in the manner of King Lear and his daughter Cordelia. Goodman concludes his story thus:

It is a peculiar animal species [i.e., the human being], noted for its long childhood dependency...On Darwinian grounds, survival by useful traits, we must assume that this eminently successful animal is by now inborn to tyrannize during its dependency, psychologically free, physically weak...and to submit during its competency, physically strong, psychologically servile. Perhaps a root of the Lear complex is in our natures and cannot be eradicated. It was long ago, said Kafka, that the dogs became doggish. Now it is too late. (*The Facts of Life* 283).

This brief engagement with Kafka through allusion underscores an equation between the deterministic limitations of the human species and the dog species, trapped in cycles of power and prey to either learned or inborn traits. ‘Doggishness’ functions at other times to interrogate a discourse of naturalness that Goodman culls from the writings of Freud, Nietzsche, and Kafka. As he writes in *Kafka’s Prayer*, “Investigations of a Dog” “is the greatest stor[y] about dogs... about the doggishness of the man...when finally a man no longer inhabits his whine, his snarl, and his growl” (242-3). Goodman goes as far as to identify Kafka with the dog (Kafka, after all, called his tubercular cough “the animal”) and declares the final scene of the “Investigations,” in which the narrator-dog encounters the beautiful visionary dog who chastises him for his fasting, “the most inward in all the romances of Franz Kafka” (248). An inquiry into the overlap between the fable and the animal story, between the man as animal and the animal as man, makes legible a recognition of difference and otherness—what Goodman terms Kafka’s robust “agnosticism” that rejects epistemological and ontological closure. The unconscious becomes a territory of estranged beings composed of “animal identities.” This recognition is both tragic, an elegiac loss,

and a potential source of liberation. Goodman is particularly interested in the dog as man's closest counterpart and oblique double.

The first of multiple imitations of Kafka's short stories that Goodman produced is called "The Legs of My Dog: Some Notes on Gross Physiology and Visible Form" (1946). This essayistic narrative unpacks the significance of various human and nonhuman gaits, especially that of "the dog Tinkerbelle" (*The Facts of Life* 206). Just as Kafka's dog-narrator circles around the question of the source of the dogs' food and never penetrates to an answer, Goodman's "observations," "speculations," and "interpretations" bear no fruit concerning the "geometric" analysis on the "fundamental question" about "the locomotion of animals" (207). The narrator opines that, in humans, "swimming arms is a vestige of the four-legged gait" and that the "[t]rotting of the dog [retains] the advantage of the four leg[ged]" gait that conceals the genitals, humankind's "upright posture" leading to "a loss of smell" and the "genitals exposed" (207). This, according to the story, leads to greater neurotic anxiety and sexual repression, an elimination of a particular erotogenic zone (i.e. the nose). Goodman intertwines Freud's observations with Kafka's techniques and themes, since Freud makes almost this exact remark on the extinction of pleasurable olfactory affects, ensuing neurosis, and their links to posture in his "Rat Man" case study: "And here I should like to raise the general question of whether the atrophy of the sense of smell (which was an inevitable result of man's assumption of an erect posture) and the consequent organic repression of his pleasure in smell may not have had a considerable share in the origin of his susceptibility to nervous disease" (Sulloway 377). The dog is Goodman's privileged site of psychoanalytic investigation, since dogs often occupy a liminal space between the domestic and an atavistic wildness. This is why "[o]nly a dog—neither man

nor other beast—is so sad”—since, due to its frequently-dependent connection to mankind, it experiences forms of repression through osmosis and is therefore a subject for psychoanalysis (*Kafka's Prayer* 242).

Goodman's fascination with Kafka's strangers extends to geographic, cultural, and racial as well as the phylogenetic distance (or seeming distance) that we've been tracing so far. "The Great Wall of China" is one of the short stories that doesn't foreground nonhumans (though they appear here and there as the vampiric, blood-sucking "people of the north") that was nevertheless a beacon for imitative practices for many of the writers in this study—notably Christopher Caudwell. The first line of Kafka's story troubled Goodman: "The Great Wall of China was finished off at its northernmost corner" (*GWC* 148). He objected to the idea that the Great Wall, with its piecemeal construction throughout the ages, could ever truly be finished in Kafka's universe, which has such deep investments in the fragmentary. His claims concerning this problem in *Kafka's Prayer* are carried over into an imitation titled "The Emperor of China" (1945), where he dwells on the dire consequences of the Great Wall actually being complete. In his critical monograph he provides a kind of preface to his creative reworking, writing:

I for my part do not believe that the Great Wall was completed. If it had been completed it would at once have begun to move, to close in, to circle round the vortex of the repressions of the people of China: its completeness would have led to frightful civil wars (as we may guess from our own technological states); the people would be trapped in their engulfing wall. Or again: granting, as he says, that the Wall is a defense against the barbarians of the north; we have met these barbarians, they are the leopards that invade the temple and the savage troops that terrorize the King; they are the return of the repressed. Against these is the Wall complete? (236-7)

Two notable moves are made here. Goodman doubts that the Great Wall could have been completed because it would have led to a sovereign state, along with a discontented and closed civilization (whose advancements, in Freudian terms, would only lead to greater repression) that is antithetical to the vision articulated in Kafka's work. He also equates Kafka's vampiric northern barbarians with the leopards whose terrors become part of orthodox ritual practice in "He," in addition to the horse-soldiers in "An Old Manuscript." The uncanny "return of the repressed," the return of animal significance and unruly, violent desires to human consciousness, is an essential element of Goodman's interpretation of Kafka's stories. In his metaphorical reading, the mind or the Great Wall is always porous, fragmented, and the idea of the uncanny being sanitized and prohibited from infiltrating its unseen or forgotten apertures is an absurd impossibility. This facet of Goodman's argument corresponds to a critique of sovereignty holding any firm grip on Kafka's world, which is always shifting ground, open to contamination, and geographically and phylogenetically mobile.

Goodman uses Kafka's incipit as a springboard for his own creative imitation in "The Emperor of China." In it, neither Franz Kafka nor his fragmentary story are ever explicitly cited, but the third section in Goodman's piece begins with an unambiguous assimilation of its predecessor text: "The Great Wall of China is complete and all China realizes with horror that it is imprisoned...In the court of the Emperor of China they sound the gong of alarm" (*The Facts of Life* 180). Goodman directly borrows language from the Muir's version of "The Great Wall of China," noting the country's "vastness," its "rituals," the forever absent "immortal Emperor," and the piecemeal "building of the Great Wall of China," only to pose Kafka's text as a metaphor for the inevitably incomplete and imperfect act of writing (179, 176, 180-181). He then proceeds

(the story is somewhat chaotically constructed) to deconstruct the mysteries of China by introducing a character called the “Master of La Gaya Scienza,” a mask of Friedrich Nietzsche, who merges, at times, with the Emperor of China. The sense of oceanic temporal and spatial vastness and awe that Kafka creates in his original is vandalized by a Nietzschean spirit of irreverence near the end of Goodman’s story. The Emperor “plays with the milk and drool, the shit, the piss, the blood, and the semen”; “when he masturbates he opens high and wide the dome of heaven,” altering Kafka’s more sublime description of a land “so vast that no fable could do justice to its vastness, the heavens can scarcely span it”; we learn that “from turds of shit he fashions out the elephants and the bears,” and, finally, “[t]hat when he fucks, the electric friction makes the sky blue.” This visceral comedy doesn’t quite hit the mark, but takes an anarchic hammer to the vestiges of hierarchical structure in Kafka’s text. He seeks to restore hermeneutic range and scope Kafka’s story, to the “strenuous” and “acrobatic” agnosticism that Goodman views as a first principle in Kafka’s art (233). Isaac Rosenfeld continues this investigation of phylogenetic hierarchy and agnosticism in a less experimental though cognate vein.

### **III. Isaac Rosenfeld’s Talking Dogs**

Delmore Schwartz records a conversation with William Barret in his journal in 1947 during which Isaac Rosenfeld is given the epithet “the Jewish Franz Kafka” (*Journals* 296). Years later, Leslie Fiedler would dwell on both Rosenfeld and Schwartz, great literary prodigies who never achieved the success they sought, both “Jewish dream peddlers” inspired by Franz

Kafka who died before their time—Rosenfeld dying of a heart attack in 1956, when he was only

38. Fiedler writes:

How much more comfortable we feel with those exceptional figures of the forties-fifties who did not quite make it, dying too soon and still relatively unknown, like Isaac Rosenfeld, or surviving dimly inside of their wrecked selves until they could disappear unnoticed, like Delmore Schwartz. I, at least, find myself thinking often these days of Rosenfeld, who might well (it once seemed) have become our own Franz Kafka and who perhaps *was* (in a handful of stories like “The Pyramids” and “The Party,” dreams of parables or parables of dreams) all the Kafka we shall ever have. (*Fiedler Reader* 231).

Rosenfeld’s career “was a minor one,” and despite one novel, *Passage from Home* (1946), one posthumous collection of stories and another of essays, “he is best remembered as a reviewer of books” (Shechner 24). A number of subsequent critics—contrary to the dominant trend in this study—have noted Kafka’s influence on Rosenfeld’s “minor” fiction. Mark Shechner points out the various “alienated heroes” in “surreal and Kafkaesque” stories like “The Railroad,” “The Brigadier,” and “The Party” (28). Bruce Andrew Wentworth’s unpublished thesis *Isaac Rosenfeld: A Debt to Kafka* (1958) records how various stories, such as “The New Egypt,” “The Brigadier,” “The Colony,” and others, mobilize Kafka’s “technical device[]...” of “ironic questioning” and the “tendency for Rosenfeld’s fantasy to be less extreme than Kafka’s” (63, 66). What Rosenfeld termed “the pain of discipleship” is amply documented in Steven Zipperstein’s biography *Rosenfeld’s Lives* (2009) (Wentworth 83). This short-lived “golden boy” had an “obsessive need to imitate others like Kafka,” Zipperstein writes (59, 6). He continues:

His Kafkaesque experiments, a primary focus of his in this period [the late 1940s] are his least regarded works, despite the fact that the first of these, “The Colony,” seemed quite



promising... Yet the manuscripts Rosenfeld now wrote seemed meandering and ponderous. (It is curious that Rosenfeld sought to hard to imitate Kafka, who had left him cold when he first read him.) Soon he more than embraced Kafka, aiming to make himself into his prime, contemporary disciple. (96)

Saul Bellow recalls this proclivity for mimicry, both in real life and in art, in a brief essay on his “friend” and “rival”: “He loved hoaxes, mimicry, parody, and surrealist poems. He imitated steam irons, clocks, airplanes, tugboats, big-game hunters, Russian commissars, Village poets and their girl friends” (*Preserving the Hunger* 14-15).

The majority of the commentary on Rosenfeld’s Kafka imitations skims over the surface of this intertextual relationship, making discursive though relevant points about technique (as in Wentworth’s thesis) or generalizations about Rosenfeld’s attraction to the “terrors” of “contemporary society” or the anxieties about “the inability to believe in God” relayed through Kafka’s fiction (in the case of Zipperstein) (121, 125). Only a small group of stories has been examined—all of them dealing in some fashion with bureaucratic or theological subjects. By turning to Rosenfeld’s essay on Kafka, some of his rarely discussed stories, and to various unpublished journals and manuscripts housed at the Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago, a very different picture of Rosenfeld’s relationship with Kafka will emerge that is part and parcel of the cosmopolitan and creaturely currents that we’ve been mapping.

Rosenfeld places special emphasis on “Investigations of a Dog” at the end of his essay “Kafka and His Critics.” He speaks of its “secular mysticism” concerning *la condition canine*, claiming that:

Here, the generality of Kafka's subject may be seen at its most general, but also its most personal and poetic, expression. The subject is at once an inquiry into man's relation to God, the mystery of faith, the nature of theology and of empirical knowledge, the nature of the scientist's and the artist's task... It is for its final assertion of freedom that the story is most remarkable; and here lies its great importance to the ultimate analysis of Kafka's symbolism, to which it supplies the master key. (*Preserving the Hunger* 173).

Reiterating Muir's statement in his "Preface" to *The Great Wall of China*, Rosenfeld declares that this late story is a "key" to Kafka's fiction. And like Muir, he does not interpret it in purely theological terms, but situates the theological in a matrix of other interpretive possibilities such as "the nature of the scientist's and artist's tasks," construing the tale as a gesture toward semantic "freedom." Out of the entire breadth of Kafka's fiction, "Investigations" turns out to be the text most generative for Rosenfeld's creative work.

In Rosenfeld's unpublished manuscript letters and journals at the University of Chicago, he records his fascination with imitative writing and Franz Kafka's work. For most of his career Rosenfeld did not "object...to doing imitations," and at one stage he speculates: "Whom shall I imitate today?," suggesting that imitation was an integral and exploratory element of his creative practice ("Ubiquitous Oblique" 950; Zipperstein 96). Yet his dependence on imitation was also, as he wrote about William Sansom's reliance on the "magician's trick" of Kafka imitation, "a form of confinement" ("Ubiquitous Oblique 950). He writes in his journal: "When will I be able to write so thoughtfully that only I, as I actually am, will appear on the page?" (Rosenfeld Papers). This tension between liberation and confinement was a hallmark of his apprenticeship to Kafka. He was attracted to Kafka's "bright images" stemming from "unconscious process[es]," the fact that he was "an anonymous author: making myths and fables out of his guilt as the first mythologists, the Greeks, did" (Rosenfeld Papers). Kafka's fable-writing, his techniques of

anonymity, syncopation, and occlusion seeped into Rosenfeld's work over time; but his first encounters with Kafka's novels were not propitious. One of the few midcentury American writers to read and write German with some (decent though shaky) competency, Rosenfeld writes to his friend, the novelist Oskar Tarcov: "Ich habe eben eine deutsche Krankheit ausgeduldet, während dessen ich einige Werke Franz Kafka und Franz Werfel gelesen habe" (I just suffered a German illness, during which I read some works by Franz Kafka and Franz Werfel) (Rosenfeld Papers). He continues in English: "The last two days... I have been reading Kafka and Werfel. The more Kafka I read the less I think of him. I read some of his novelettes and short stories in German. They all seem very silly to me, including the most symbolic and paranoid ones" (Rosenfeld Papers). Yet his "German illness," his attraction to German-language expressionism, continued, "Germany [being] involved in [his] life much more than France" (Rosenfeld Papers). He records taking "off a week to read the *Castle* [and not being] too much impressed. The *Trial* is much better, and so are some of the short stories. The *Castle* is bourgeois, and pretty dull in spots" (Rosenfeld Papers). Rosenfeld's initial response to Kafka's mystique was one of rejection; he was more impressed by *Der Prozess* and *Die Erzählungen*, but even these took some time for him to fully appreciate and desire to emulate.

Rosenfeld emphasizes the more generative qualities of Kafka's 'fabulist' and "fantastic" stories in another letter to Oscar Tarcov (whose novel *Bravo, My Monster* was termed "Kafkaesque" in a review by Saul Bellow), marshaling these aspects of Kafka's work in offering editorial advice: "You have been writing two sorts of story: the naturalistic & the fantastic. I like what you have done in the latter vein more than the first... If this is your bent, stick to it, and what you may think will be lacking in texture, in actual narrative weight, tension, drama, density,

etc., will [rouse] of its own accord, as you elaborate your myths, your “fable.” After all, Kafka...” (Rosenfeld Papers). Rosenfeld was alive to these fantastic and fabulist elements himself. The figure of the dog was an all-important subject in his fiction that enabled him to explore aspects of the creaturely life.

Saul Bellow remembers that Rosenfeld’s animal friend, “Smoky, the rakish little short-legged brown dog, was only partly housebroken and chewed books”; this dog was a fixture of Rosenfeld’s dingy residence on 76th Street (*Preserving the Hunger* 14). Versions of Smoky surface again and again in Rosenfeld’s work. He uses Kafka’s texts as a conduit into issues of domestic animal life and psychology. Unpublished autograph stories like “Man is an Animal,” “The Coalescence of Categories,” and especially “Conversations with a Dog” (along with one published though largely unexamined story called “An Experiment with Tropical Fish,” appearing in the posthumous collection *Alpha and Omega*), rely heavily on Kafka’s “Investigations of a Dog” (Rosenfeld Papers). In his journal Rosenfeld writes: “Dogs have a special sense for the sadness of life—it’s in their eyes, even as pups. Now E. says that they hear the weeping of Zaddikim—which is entirely possible, dogs being close to man (*Preserving the Hunger* 414). “Conversations with a Dog” picks up on this sadness, the dog’s imperfect correspondence with the divine world, the world of mankind, and the world of the animals; due to dogs’ “closeness to man,” they are limited participants in multiple modes of sacred and secular existence. Rosenfeld writes in his unpublished manuscript of “Conversations with a Dog”:

Now that Smokey is eight months old, and has attained a definite outlook on the world, I have begun to talk with him. (If you think it is impossible to exchange opinions with a

dog, you just don't understand dogs). I speak to him in this manner. "Smokey, I say, "you are a dog. *Canus*, is the word for it, *Skylos*, *Hund*."

"Very well," he says, "I understand that. Don't make such a fuss over a simple matter. Of course I am a dog."

...I mean it in a different sense, Smokey. Where I say you are a dog, I mean to point out to you a fact about the order of nature. You are a dog. Non I am a man. A man, Smokey, *Homo Sapiens*." (Rosenfeld Papers)

Smokey happens to speak German, knows more about the narrator's domestic situation—especially the existence of other creatures in the house (such as mice)—than his human interlocutor, and deconstructs his 'master's' ideas about the "order of nature" which Smokey doesn't deem "fair" (Rosenfeld Papers). Rosenfeld once again answers, or renders moot, a question posed in Kafka's text—in this case the dog narrator's question in "Investigations of a Dog": "Whence does the earth procure [the dogs'] food?" He builds off of Muir's popular interpretation of "Investigations" that views the origins of the dog kingdom's food as a tragic blind spot, the food-proffering human species hovering spectrally throughout the story, acting as an invisible though omnipotent ringmaster. Rosenfeld addresses the dog narrator's rather painfully simple question in his story. At one point his narrator brags about the "The human mind that invented dog food..." (Rosenfeld Papers). But the culinary crux of Kafka's tale proves no riddle for Smokey, the philosopher dog, who uses the narrator's phylogenetic hubris against him, hitting his ego where it hurts—his vocational pretensions as a writer-philosopher and professional intellectual, about which he is deeply insecure. Smokey replies that there "is no advantage" to being human and that even if he did "desire to be a man," he most certainly would not desire "to be a writer" like Rosenfeld's persona. Later in the story, in a "metaphysical

speculation” that Smokey responds to impatiently, the narrator concedes that he, “too, struggle[s] with [his] identity and...yearn[s] to be a Man” (Ibid.). Man as an ideal, as an overman, underpins his admission and exposes his speciesism to further ridicule. Yet after the pair encounter a seeing-eye dog leading a blind man down the street, Smokey concludes on an assertion of phylogenetic parity inflected with a new supervisory tone: “Good Almighty made all us creatures alike. Do you hear me? King of Creation, indeed! And watch how you’re holding that parcel, or you spill it all on the ground!” (Ibid.). He turns the narrator’s desire for control on its head.

Smokey’s command to his human friend at the end of “Conversations with a Dog” cements his position that species hierarchies are a myth and that phylogenetic hubris leads to intellectual embarrassment. Rosenfeld extrapolates this interrogation of species categories, once again in the manner of Kafka, in a story called “Red Wolf,” originally published in *Epoch* in 1948 and collected posthumously in *Alpha and Omega* (1966). The story was originally written in Yiddish, which is not a great surprise since Rosenfeld attended the Sholom Aleichem school in Chicago as a youth; “Rosenfeld stands alone among the *Partisan Review* writers of his generation to have” tried his “hand at Yiddish prose” (Shechner 412). He did not write “all that much—one story and three short fables....but the effort alone is striking, and the prose itself... bears comparison to Rosenfeld’s style in English” (Shechner 413). In Yiddish “Red Wolf” appeared as “Dos meser” (The Knife). It’s hard to discern whether Rosenfeld composed the story first in Yiddish and then translated it into English or went about it the other way around, but Shechner suggests that the former is the likelier scenario. Kafka’s high quotient of translatability and transmissibility becomes extremely legible, given that one of Rosenfeld’s stories that’s most

indebted to Kafka is turned into not one but two languages, possibly from a reading of Kafka in the original German. Rosenfeld, in a rejection of high modernist formal innovation, preferred to absorb straightforward, replicable styles rather than grasping after “stylistic innovation” (Shechner 29). For him, Kafka demands to be mediated, even self-mediated, to be re-created on multiple textual planes.

“Red Wolf” is a story about the narrator, an abandoned dog and his recalcitrant, misanthropic, “wild” companion Red Wolf; both are imprisoned in a laboratory kennel. They physically deteriorate throughout the narrative and are implicitly put to death (out of scene) at the end. There are many qualities in “Red Wolf” that make it “a fable of the Holocaust and of the liberal imagination’s bewilderment before a reality to which its habitual virtues of tolerance and moderation...do not apply” (Shechner 413). But Rosenfeld’s engagement with animal-thinking cannot be limited to narratives of anthropocentric terror alone, although such readings are inevitable components of any Jewish writing after the Holocaust. Mark Shechner, the only critic to examine this story, however briefly, notes that “Rosenfeld took Franz Kafka for a prophet of totalitarianism and...adopted a Kafka-esque voice in much of his writing, Yiddish and English, in homage to Kafka and in memoriam to the Jews. “Dos meser” / “Red Wolf” is redolent of Kafka in both style—abstract reasonableness throbbing with suppressed panic—and conception—dogs that ponder the universe and pit their theories of life against the inscrutabilities of their confinement” (413). He continues: “Philosophical fish and theorizing dogs...would appeal to a man like Rosenfeld who loved animals and as a Reichian, held them to be biologically wiser than men” (Ibid.). Rosenfeld’s stories are metaphorical, certainly, but also have a pragmatic valence that is caustically critical of both ethnic and biological hierarchies, seeking to clue people in to

interethnic as well as interspecies cruelty. There is an examination of Jewish isolation and genocide working alongside a similar examination of the ‘nonhuman condition’. As Mira Beth Wasserman writes in *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals*: “One could catalogue a seemingly endless list of examples whereby animality converges with hierarchies of gender, class, nation, ethnicity, and sexuality. The potency of the animal trope lies precisely in its fungibility, its potential as a placeholder for virtually any excluded other” (77). Similarly, Andrew Benjamin argues—pushing against a “reduction or forced similarity” between Jews, who were often represented in antisemitic iconography as animals—that there is, in fact, “an important relationship between Jews and animals...[t]hey appear within the history of philosophy, art and theology in ways in which the differing forms of conjunction mark the manner in which dominant traditions construct themselves” (3-4). A recognition that the Jew and animal as external others against which Western traditions often define themselves, providing threats to the coherence of their dominant concepts and categories, can help enlarge the hermeneutic range of Rosenfeld’s animal stories to more than historical conceits about the Shoah.

In “Red Wolf,” Rosenfeld combines the style and speculative manner of “Investigations of the Dog” (he employs Kafka’s formal essayistic language in a similar fashion, with such phrases as “standards of civilization,” “simulate a condition of utter detachment,” “in fact as well as principle,” “at liberty to exercise my higher faculties,” etc.) with highly explicit and frequent borrowings from “Report to an Academy” (342). The nameless narrator-dog begins his story when he is “in lock-up” in a “cage”—just as Redpeter’s memories “begin...inside a cage” (283). Redpeter’s cage is said to be “too low for [him] to stand up in and too narrow to sit down in” while the narrator’s in “Red Wolf” is “small...barely enough room to curl up in a corner and no



room at all to turn around in” (284; 340). The misanthropic character Red Wolf, however, is an anti-Rotpeter, who is not content to find a “way out” by assimilating into human society; he has, rather, vowed “an oath of everlasting enmity to mankind” (339). Kafka’s ape-man reflects that he “could certainly have managed by degrees to bite through the lock of [his] cage,” but “did not do it” because it would have led to no genuine escape—he was, after all, ocean-locked, on a ship surrounded by men with weapons and no prospective help on the horizon (286). Despite the hopelessness of Red Wolf’s plight, Rosenfeld’s narrator-dog describes how his fellow prisoner squeezes his muzzle “out of the cage as if he hoped to reach the lock and bite through” (339). The protest against humanization, and a celebration of the undomesticated animal’s wild and generative alterity, is much more robust in Rosenfeld’s story; the voice of protest against forms of animal cruelty is also much louder in his creative re-contextualization.

At the same time, Rosenfeld’s narrator-dog has attitudes equivalent to Redpeter’s. Like Kafka’s ape-man, he desires a way out rather than the mirage of “human freedom”—this corresponds to what the dog-narrator terms “conditional freedom” rather than “absolute freedom”—he is, after all, a jilted lover of mankind, unlike Red Wolf, and therefore a being invested in “compromise” (341). Near the story’s end the narrator-dog develops empathy for Red Wolf’s “regression” to the wolf, to the “marauder, a destroyer, a killer descending with [a] pack from the hills”; but he cannot escape the trap of humanity. He concludes: “Try as I may, one image stands before me, the image of the human, and it is all I aspire to and all I yearn after. I am not afraid. I do not know why this hand, which is capable of raising me up, should be the one to hold the knife. But do your work swiftly” (348). This ending, it turns out, gathers language from the conclusion of Kafka’s “Crossbreed.” Kafka’s lamb-cat-dog hybrid has similar “ambitions of a

human being,” yet the narrator suggests that such aspirations to cast aside hybridity and reterritorialize oneself into a new community are to be met with failure; Rosenfeld adopts Kafka’s fundamental pessimism and calls on violence to resolve the tension between the self and other: “Perhaps the knife of the butcher would be a release for this animal...even though it sometimes gazes at me with a look of human understanding, challenging me to do the thing of which both of us are thinking” (*GWC* 241). The figure of the dog or doggish man turns out to be the major constant linking rewritings of Kafka amongst mid-century Jewish American writers. A glance at a more well-known 20th-century prose artist will help us continue to unpack the reasons for this surprising and odd trend.

#### **IV. Saul Bellow’s “Pets of the North Shore”**

Saul Bellow did not write much about Kafka, who was very much a peripheral figure to the development of his literary career. Critics occasionally connect his work to Kafka’s, mainly his early novel, *Dangling Man* (1944). It follows a protagonist named Joseph (one critic writing that his name is “more allegorical than Kafka’s Joesph K [since] he lacks even an initial for a last name”), and involves the stresses and frustrations of protracted delays and serpentine bureaucratic systems that force Joseph to “dangle,” jobless, and never be admitted to active service in the army (*Atlas* 94). The novel is called a derivative “apprentice work,” “nearly plotless,” “about a man idling away his days in a fog of introspection”; it extracts its worldview, in part, from Kafka’s *The Trial* and *The Castle* (*Atlas* 94).

Kafka, however, as Zachary Leader informs us, “was much in the air” when Bellow was in college at the University of Chicago; “Bellow was influenced by him early in his career, as unpublished works from the late 1930s and early 1940s... suggest” (Leader 147). But which “unpublished works from the late 1930s and early 1940s” are informed by Kafka, and how are they informed by him? Leader doesn’t find this question worth pursuing given the breadth of his biographical pursuits. James Atlas references an unpublished and lost manuscript novel called “The Very Dark Trees,” in which an “enlightened Southerner...is struck by lightning and finds himself turned black”—the tale of metamorphosis raising questions of racial anxiety and prejudice in middle class America, prefiguring, it seems to me, Arthur Miller’s novel *Focus* (1945), wherein the protagonist’s new pair of glasses alters his vision, challenging his budding anti-semitic attitudes, since he, and the gentile communities around him, begin to perceive him as a Jew (Atlas 76). Bellow’s lost novel was accepted for publication in 1942, but was later canned due to the exigencies of the war. Certainly the thematic of ‘metamorphosis’ carries a Kafka-esque flavor, but since the manuscript cannot be examined in any detail, it’s impossible to say to what extent Bellow relied upon Kafka. Other and even lesser-known texts prove more rewarding, however.

Although Bellow’s “Pets of the North Shore” is referenced in multiple critical studies of his fiction, Atlas is the only critic to summarize the story, deeming it pure juvenilia and not worthy of close analysis (50). Aside from a brief quotation, all Atlas says about this early short story is “In the spring of 1936, *The Daily Northwestern* ran a short piece under his byline called “Pets of the North Shore,” which offered some self-consciously whimsical speculation about the dogs owned by suburban women...” (Ibid.). However, after recovering this story from the

Northwestern University Archives, and reading it in its entirety, it becomes obvious that “Pets of the North Shore” is, like Goodman’s and Rosenfeld’s imitations, a reworking of Kafka’s “Investigations of a Dog.” This shows that Bellow’s early work was not only inflected by Kafka’s novels, but by his animal stories as well. These spurred Bellow to experiment with modes and motifs that are extraordinarily atypical of his subsequent body of work, opening a new perspective on his early creative development.

“Pets of the North Shore” is quite short; the following passage is about a third of the entire story, and will provide ample evidence for its source material and thematic eccentricity in light of Bellow’s later, more famous novels. He was primarily a novel writer, and his short story output diminished considerably as his career progressed; while the quality of this early flash fiction piece may pale in comparison to his vast, colorful portraits of the American scene, it functions as a kind of pilot attempt to document what he termed “the moronic inferno”:

This business of the North Shore is not properly that of a writer but a sociologist. Untrained as I am I can only make generalizations, but the enterprising sociologist will someday get to the bottom of the whole problem. Who are the women of the north Shore? And since we are going to discuss their pets; what are they?...And yet further why do not the dogs have some distinction other than monstrosity or world weariness?...If the genealogy of the women is obscure, that of the dogs is even more so. Who knows where they come from? It is as great mystery, at least, as the Cretan alphabet. Nobody professes to know and nobody dares to guess. What is so strange about them is that they have no resemblance to the ordinary dog except a structural one. You wonder what has become of the primitive dignity that you associate with dogs...Not rarely you find a tremendous animal leading a frail old lady on a leash. Neither of them seems to enter in the true spirit of the thing. (*Daily Northwestern* 5).

The narrator tells us, somewhat cryptically, at the story’s end that “the frontier has gone and... something has gone with it” (*Daily Northwestern* 5). It concludes on a note of melancholy,

without harvesting any form of genuine knowledge about the women or their dogs. The similarities with “Investigations” begin with the story’s sociological method of inquiry, reminiscent of Kafka’s dog narrator’s “politico-economical observation” and “scientific inquiry” that openly admits a lack of expertise (*GWC* 21). Bellow’s sociologist hopes to “someday get to the bottom of the problem” while Kafka’s dog “devote[s] [his] whole time to the problem.” Both seek to unravel questions of origins, undertaking a genealogical approach; their styles are studded with rhetorical questions that only serve to deflect answers and block access to legitimate answers. Epistemological uncertainty, an openness to doubt, mystery, and insolubility, characterize Bellow’s animal story as well as Kafka’s.

Kafka examines the distinctions between the “ordinary dog” or “ordinary dog life” and the extraordinary appearances of the dancing dogs, the floating dogs, and the visionary hound; likewise, Bellow compares the somewhat fantastic dogs of the North shore to “the ordinary dog,” thus enhancing the sense of otherness and alienation embodied by the city’s dogs (*Daily Northwestern* 5; *GWC* 63). Uncharacteristically, in the context of Bellow’s mature fiction, this early text incorporates slight absurdist elements, swapping run-of-the-mill representations of the various species’ roles and introducing a “tremendous animal leading a frail old lady on a leash.” This reversal of roles corresponds to Isaac Rosenfeld’s manuscript story “Conversations of a Dog,” in which Smokey and (especially) the human narrator are shaken by the sight of a seeing-eye dog leading a blind man. Yet uncharacteristically—almost never in Bellow later career did he include moments that could be labeled fantastic—Bellow’s story is more fantastic than Rosenfeld’s (who had a penchant for this mode); at the same time, it’s quite melancholy, since this role-reversal is a moment of confusion rather than liberation. Neither urban creature (human

and dog) know their exact social position or value in what Bellow calls “an age of decadence,” an age of intermixture and ideological undoing (*Daily Northwestern* 5).

It wasn't only the lost minor writers of the late modernist period that helped to establish the early phases of the Kafka cult and articulate anxieties and desires about phylogenetic dominion. Even an eventual Nobel Laureate stepped out of his comfort zone and caught the fabulist contagion. The figure of the animal grows dim in Bellow's later work. In 1948 he records working on “a novelette called *The Crab and the Butterfly*” wherein “[t]he crab is human tenacious-ness to life, the butterfly is the gift of existence which the crab stalks. The crab cannot leap or chase but stands with open claws while the creature flaps over him” (*There Is Simply Too Much* 43). This novelette, which never saw the light of day, is to be the last of Bellow's “heavies,” and is a form of prep work for his next more festive project which is a “purely comic book...in a spirit of...Nietzsche's *gaya scienza*” (Leader 336). The crab and the butterfly have ossified into symbolic figures rather than dynamic characters. Only in rare letters and essays does Bellow explore the creaturely dimensions of the human. In his essay “The Sharp Edge of Life” (1951), Bellow argues that the tension between the notion that mankind is “a little lower than the angels” and “a poor bare, forked animal” is the very “struggle” the artist engages in in the establishment of character. One must struggle between an over-evaluation of the human, a religious tradition which construes mankind as “near-divine creatures” with infinite potential and the notion of a secular age which seeks to, as “Nietzsche once wrote,” diminish hubris and work against traditions that “exaggerate the value of the human personality,” “doubt[ing]” its issue from “unaccommodated” nature (*There Is Simply Too Much* 43). This minor and unnoticed strata

of Bellow's work can be traced back to his imitation of Kafka more than a decade before—only in that it continues the development of a series of questions about the divine or purely material origin of creatures such as humans and dogs and isn't a far cry from the questions that occupied Edwin Muir as early as the "Preface" to *The Great Wall of China*.

\*

For Philip Rahv, "a study of tradition and the individual talent" reveals that "a surplus of originality is more often a sign of weakness than strength" (Cooney 216). This post-Eliot generation of Jewish American late modernist writers thought of Kafka as a contemporary and a comrade, as "belonging to them" because he was an urban Jew with conflicting attachments to, and detachments from, multiple powerful traditions--Jewish, world literary, national, and linguistic ("State of Writing" 872). His writing was ripe for repurposing because it also expressed conflicting and irreconcilable desires and identities. His form and content gave them strength or a temporary and vivifying respite from outworn creative habits. The figure of the dog was a perfect correspondent to the Jewish situation that allowed them to respond to the paradox of the "perfect insider, perfect outsider" from a phylogenetic rather than a racial perspective. This point of view dissolved human differences, uniting humanity as a single group, in order to confront readers with the naive, dangerous, or even (in the case of Rosenfeld) genocidal tendencies that the human species often displays towards other groups, be they human or nonhuman. This sense of profound guilt towards animals (best articulated by Edwin Muir in *The Story and the Fable*) is a conceit about a specific historical Holocaust but also a more universal,

ongoing holocaust toward other entities and things. In these writers' Kafka imitations, human animal and nonhuman animal are pitted against one another to clarify and highlight narrators' and readers' ideological gaps and blind spots; they then tend to blur, exchange roles, and trouble master/slave dialectics. In more or less explicit ways, this mini corpus of fiction responds to the dominant narratives about Kafka, about whom, in 1948, Jean-Paul Sartre declared that "everything has been said: that he wanted to paint a picture of bureaucracy, the progress of disease, the condition of the Jews in eastern Europe, the quest for inaccessible transcendence, and the world of grace when grace is lacking" (Sartre 642). Kafka's animals have something to say about "the human condition," too (Ibid.; see Arendt). Goodman, Rosenfeld, and Bellow's rewritings register a need to think outside of these orthodox anthropocentric paradigms and experiment with supposedly minor, trivial, and outlying themes and genres that did not seem to respond to the spiritual or ethical crises plaguing human societies in the wake of WWII. Their thinking is rather ecological and planetary, although such designations would have surprised these committed urbanites. Their forays into the world of Kafka's fables and animal stories anticipate later debates in critical animal studies, cosmopolitan theory, and post-humanism that deconstruct humanity "as a unitary category," exposing its interconnectedness through a profound "bond of vulnerability" in the face and wake of crisis--be it "cognitive," environmental, political, or military (Braidotti 17-18).



## CHAPTER VII

### Conclusion

While Franz Kafka is almost universally recognized as one of the most powerful influences on 20th and 21st century literature, much of the late modernist fabulist writing that he inspired has dipped under the cultural radar. The waves of imitative experiments occurring in the aftermath of his Anglophone impact have been mostly neglected or misunderstood. A partial exception, however, are New Wave Fabulists and especially Weird writers, like Jeff VanderMeer, China Mièville, Michael Cisco (whom VanderMeer has dubbed “the American Kafka,” and Brian Evenson, all contemporary titans of speculative fiction (“American Kafka?”). Kafka comes up with great frequency in the interviews these writers have conducted and in a large swathe of the essays and articles they’ve written. They constitute the only fairly coherent creative movement with at least a surface knowledge of writers most people have never heard of, like Christopher Caudwell, Leonora Carrington, Anna Kavan, and William Sansom. They all see themselves as partaking in the world literature tradition of Kafka but are also cognizant of some of the offshoots of the first Anglophone branch of Kafkan writing that holds an important position in their imaginative genealogies. VanderMeer, for instance, praises William Sansom’s work, notes its resonances with “In the Penal Colony,” and writes that Sansom “appl[ied] a surrealist’s

sensibilities to the weird tale” (*The Weird* 290). Mièville calls Anna Kavan’s *I Am Lazarus* one of his “favorite books” and lauds her *Ice*; Mièville is one of the very few writers to be aware of Christopher Caudwell and talks in multiple articles and interviews about how Caudwell is the first “typically modern” writer to articulate some of Mièville’s own aims in art:

It may seem at first illogical that a radical theory of rationalism and consciousness, fit to puncture ahistoricism & the nostrums of both right & Fabian simpering, should be, in inchoate form, outlined in the short introduction to a 1936 collection of horror stories. (*The Week*; *TLS*; “Tentacular”)

Both VanderMeer and Mièville underscore the importance of Leonora Carrington in the development of the surrealist and creaturely strands of the Weird (*The Weird* 1115). In one form or another, they find an epistemological pessimism to be at the philosophical root of all Weird writers’ aesthetic systems, derived in large part from Kafka.

It’s crucial to observe, too, that it’s not *The Trial* and *The Castle* that Weird writers cite most frequently as giving them a new “sense of what writing could do”; but “The Country Doctor,” “The Coming of the Messiah,” “The Metamorphosis,” “In the Penal Colony”; the aphorisms about devils, a “rotting bitch,” ceremonial leopards, and a cage-seeking bird; and imaginary fables (that Michael Cisco has fabricated but are informed by his particular vision of Kafka) about “a woodworker [that Kafka] could never manage to drive in the right direction...about an Eskimo hunting seals...tracking them first on the ice, then in the water... [and] one about a man who invented a new kind of light” (Cisco 12, 19, 21; *Weird Fiction Review*). Collages and assemblages of beings and “vibrant matter”—this is the legacy Kafka bequeathed to writers in love with monsters, the ecological interconnectedness of the

(non)human body, transformations, corporeal mutilation, breaks and inconsistencies in space and time, the sparks created by the collision of modernism and atavism, and a profound intellectual humility. Yet the astonishing variety of writers caught in the webs of Kafka's English-language texts and driven to rewrite them--Scottish translators, English Marxists and Marxist apostates, British surrealists, American writers of prose and poetry or prose-poetry, and Jewish American urbanites, shows that this phenomenon was not restricted to a few stray members of a subterranean avant-garde. They contributed texts to a bonafide event in the literary culture of the day with consequences felt even in writing published in the last few years.

Beyond tracing a genealogy and recovering a neglected strand of the Kafka effect, this study makes significant inroads into reclaiming the relevance of the study of imitation, which has long been deemed a minor or fruitless subject of critical inquiry. If one were to rely on the corpus of reviews and scholarship from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, one would come away thinking that only Kafka's novels had changed elements of a cultural landscape in political and spiritual crisis. Illuminating a phenomenon of imitative writing--a supposedly conservative intertextual relationship--demonstrates the knowledge that can be gained from studying a text's photographic negatives, the dense strata of anomalies and repetitions that are marks of another's idiolect. A reader competent in the idiosyncratic formal qualities and thematic bundles of an author can uncover strains of transmission and reception that are invisible to those concentrating only on a particular writer's canon or the nonfictional cultural artifacts generated by the expanding circles of his or her meaning. Fiction and poetry by forgotten and canonical writers--and the intersections of these primary texts with nonfictional paratexts--can complement the study of essays, letters, and diaries, revealing webs of overlap that can restructure the way we think about

a writer and their legacy. Imitation logs, in a very concrete way, systems of signifying exchange (unlike the more shadowy migrations of influence and appropriation). It can tell us just as much about reception as a contemporary book review or essay and is therefore a crucial historiographical site for investigation. The process of tracking Bloomian “swerves” proves just as revealing as the process of tracking replicants, concentrated affinities between signifiers that register upswings in potentially unrecorded arenas of reception.

Kafka had more to offer than a proleptic politico-theological discourse. For those familiar with the critical literature on Kafka, assemblages and nonhumans, fables and animal stories rarely come up in discussions about Kafka’s appeal to writers in the period before WWII and into the sixties. The weird short story written in an allegorical style about animals and nonhumans became, in fact, a ‘thing’. Through a study of imitation, it’s clear that Kafka and his rewriters nourished a critique or emendation of the figure of the human in literature that is being extrapolated and reconfigured to this day. Kafka and his imitators “side with the outcasts” in their representations of strangers, composite humanity, and non-humanity, and through minor, “apocryphal literary genres,” such as the fable (which Adorno contrasts to rationalistic and overdetermined parables and myths); both the ancestral animal and the ancestral genre are “receptacles of the forgotten” and function to return repressed or discarded pathways of consciousness and communication (Adorno 246, 265; *Illuminations* 132). “Exposure to otherness,” “encounters with difference,” “methodical cultivation of a degree of estrangement” and a “privileging” of “other, more open affiliations” speak to a cosmopolitan skepticism about naturalness, purification, and hierarchization; the fable, with its allegorical style and epistemological provocations, cultivates in the reader a sense of uncanny formal and thematic

estrangement (Gilroy 75-6). Both estranging oneself from one's own aesthetic habitat through acts of imitation and imitating a constellation of estranging formal devices are vital cosmopolitan practices in the broadest sense of the term used by Paul Gilroy and Rebecca Walkowitz.

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