

## A Psychological Analysis on Franz Kafka's *The Castle*

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### ABSTRACT

*The Castle* is an unfinished novel, which was written in 1922 by Kafka. It is a continuation of his earlier works. It does not tackle any new themes or expand to new areas of thought. It has no great incidents, so no real plot, no climax, no end, not even a hero in the normal sense, just a paradoxical figure who seems to start a quest in his imagination. In his imaginative world, there is only a seemingly omnipresent castle that dominates the village below. The story is based on a struggle which depicted observations, dialogues and a string of episodes in which K.'s ambition is thwarted by hidden powers. The struggle which blends into a single, symbolic action revolves around the castle as a place, a goal, a symbol, an authority and K.'s fate. Kafka's *The Castle* is the dramatization of man's self-discovery in the depth of dark, ambiguous and diabolic world. This world which has been pictured by Kafka is the world of the Castle itself. This paper attempts to make a psychological study on Kafka's *The Castle*.

**Keywords:** Kafka, *The Castle*, Psychology, Self, Hope, Life, Sin.

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### INTRODUCTION

*The Castle* has a story centering round a character called K. He is a land-surveyor. In the story, K calls himself a land-surveyor, perhaps, to find a way into the castle. But at a symbolic level, he is more of a life-surveyor than a land-surveyor. In this context Greenberg [1] says: One who comes to survey land in such a universal world is a life surveyor, a thinker who tries to grasp the whole of life in the survey of his consciousness. K has been hired to survey an estate or small principality ruled by a certain Count Westwest. Its principal features are an undistinguished village inhabited by shopkeepers and artisans and a nearby hill with a castle occupied by Government offices. K's problem is to go to the Castle and find out what he is expected to do. Normally this should be a simple routine matter, but he meets with a maddening succession of obstacles. His struggles to reach his goal and to prove that he has been engaged as a surveyor make up the story. In the first edition the story ended with Barnabas securing for K an interview with an official of the Castle Erlanger. The novel was cut short by Kafka's death. In the second edition Max Brod published another episode from Kafka's manuscript in which K is interviewed by an official named Bürgel who assures him that the Castle far from rejecting K is actually eager to communicate with him. It is only necessary to try a different approach. This message of hope falls on deaf ears, however, for this time K has fallen asleep. According to Brod, the story was to end with K continuing his struggle until he dies of exhaustion. As he lies on his deathbed, word arrives from the Castle saying that although K has no valid claim to be in the village yet taking auxiliary circumstances into account he will be permitted to continue to live there. Thus the novel centers round K, who is an expatriate. It is also interesting to note that there is an air of permanent homelessness about K. He also seems to have accepted his fate as the rootless wanderer on a quest haunted by a compellingly sinister atmosphere. Much the same can be said about Kafka. Most of Kafka's protagonists are in some way inextricably trapped in some fashion and the readers are also engulfed by the text as K's problem becomes their own.

### Trace of Allegory in Kafka's *The Castle*

*The Castle* is an allegory for Kafka's nightmare of the unconscious world. K, the protagonist of the novel, finds himself in a vicious circle. He starts his journey into the dark jungle of the Unconscious. The more he tries to get closer to the village and the villagers, the more suspicious they get about him. The more he tries to communicate with the castle, the more he is denied the access to it, and which in turn makes it urgent for him to prove his identity to the villagers. "Very simply", replied the superintendent, "you haven't up till now come into real contact with our authorities. All those contacts of yours have been illusory, but owing to your ignorance of the circumstances, you

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take them to be real" [2]. The identity of the Ego is only an illusion. The Unconscious does not let the Ego be identified. K has a wish to go into the castle as soon as a possible, but the circumstances do not allow to him to do so. He meets many different women, officials, but none of them prove helpful. They neither reject him totally nor let him go, nor do they accept him as the land-surveyor. Here, in *The Castle*, the sense of limbo is communicated to the reader in so many diverse and subtle ways. There is a grand mechanism of the Unconscious at work, which mainly comprises interwoven patterns of paradoxical situations. The first quality that induces the feeling of limbo is the problem of inaccessibility and unattainability of the castle. To put an end to this wretched condition and to get everything settled, he holds talks with the officials of the castle, but the way to the castle seems inaccessible. The more the lands-surveyor goes towards the castle, the more frustrated he becomes and the further the castle moves away from him. The castle is unreachable, just like the look of a mirage to a thirsty person who is lost in a barren and hot desert on a summer's day. In these circumstances, K keeps on spinning around the same spot and not getting a step closer to the castle.

### A Psychological Analysis on Kafka's *The Castle*

*The Castle* is a presentation of a struggle of the Self and a quest in the direction of infinity and transcendental world. The shadow of the Other is felt everywhere. It suppresses each individual's self. No one can claim for his identity. If he claims he will only deceive himself. For instance, K's case in this state is more significant. K is a land-surveyor who has been summoned to the castle. He starts some few indirect contacts with the castle through a letter he receives and a telephone conversation he overhears. Finally two officials from the castle finalize his appointment. Yet he himself is never fully convinced and never relaxes in his efforts to make quite sure of it. He feels he must penetrate to the very centre of authority and brings a kind of clinching evidence for his claim. Still at last he yields in paralyzed despair and receives a letter granting him permission to stay in the village.

The endless road leading to the unreachable castle amounts to non-road. To have walked on an endless road towards an unreachable destination for a whole week, amounts to not having walked at all. K is not walking. He just seems to be walking in a dream of the Unconscious. This is a nightmarish shadow of the Unconscious which veils the inner eyes of the Ego. Walking in this shadow is as if taking a walk on non-existent road towards a non-existent castle. He is merely taking a walking posture, as if he is performing a mime before our eyes on a bare stage, walking on a sham road toward a sham castle K. is absolutely stagnant and floating in a vacuum.

Another quality which begets the sense of inaccessibility of the castle is the bureaucracy and the demonic hierarchy of the castle (a symbol of the Unconscious) which never allows K a direct encounter with Klamm, the supreme official of the castle who seems particularly attentive to K's affairs. It is also due to inaccessibility of Klamm, that K cannot overcome his problem.

He is doomed to remain in this state of indeterminacy, uncertainty and the vacillation between hope and disappointment. He is both, an honored and boastful land-surveyor and a degraded, miserable janitor at the same time. He is neither a member of the castle nor a member of the village. He is rejected by both. He is not needed or wanted any more. Yet, K does not seem to be altogether cursed out. The occasional gleams of hope do not let him give up his efforts. The castle demonstrates a gradual process of the degradation of man, who has been mocked and teased. He is the loser of a game which the Unconscious plays with its cards. He is oppressed by the Unconscious through the authority of the father. He, as a wanderer, is subjected to what his father wants. Even Frieda, Klamm's former mistress, a motherly figure cannot help him. The authority wants to keep him in waiting and in false hope. K does not truly love Frieda. He uses her only for reaching up to the castle, but, at the end, this trick comes to nothing. Frieda and her lover both run off. What remains before K is only a maze with no way out.

In the episode of K and Klamm, the former makes this matter clear. Klamm is a personification of the Unconscious which dominates the darkness, emptiness, over the Ego. Klamm takes over K's ego through different ways. He sends different officials to him that one by one take him closer to the annihilation of his authentic self. For instance Klamm sends Frieda to K, until he faces up to with the reality of false hope under the title of love. Love gives hope but not forever. Klamm is a personification of impersonal love of love itself, of the powerful spirit which permeates the whole universe. Klamm's love for Gardana's case is not permanent but only a transient memory, which she is loath to contaminate. In the world of Unconscious, love, feeling is nothing but only suffering, waiting and even collapse. K's love toward Frieda is a good example of this case. She leaves him and runs off with one of his assistants. Here, the story is cut off. But Max Brod quotes Kafka's suggestion for the conclusion in the last days of his life. He suggests that at the end K. gets the permission of the castle for living in the village while he is dying. Here the story ends but without any suggestion of solution. So, what the whole story tells us is only a gradual demolition process of man's ego in touch with the dark world of the Unconscious. The Unconscious traps Ego and leads it to the final break. Kafka knows that the unconscious world is only an obstacle for man's ego in recognition

of what it is. Perhaps, by death it is possible to come to this recognition. The co-existence of ego with the other's egos is not possible. So K eagerly accepts this truth by embracing death.

In addition to the interpretation given above there are also other interesting commentaries from the psychological perspective. The psychoanalytic interpretations differ according to the school of the interpreter. One Freudian reading sees the castle as the mother-figure and Count Westwest as the father, while K's quest is actually an Oedipal wish. A Jungian critic sees the life of *The Castle* as representing the Unconscious a realm which is inaccessible, illogical, imperious, and amoral, yet charged with life, power and mystery. K. is, therefore, striving to achieve a harmonious relationship between the conscious intellect and the unconscious. Until he can do so, he is alienated from himself. His best hope lies in Frieda who is at one with the unconscious. In Jungian language she is K's *anima*, the incarnation of the repressed, other side of his personality. Like Dante's Beatrice, she is a guide, and her name means peace (in German *Frieden*).

K is a victim of a system which stares him in the eye. No one can help him out. For instance, when K is going to request Barnabas for help, he meets his unfortunate family members who are shunned by the villagers because the youngest daughter, Amalia, had once bravely declined the sexual advances of a castle official. Amalia's form of stoicism leads her to embrace her terrible isolation proudly and with dignity. But Olga, Amalia's sister, acts independently. She does not share Amalia's rigidity of attitude. She has no evidence of the good will of the castle and has been met by the hostility of the villagers and indifference of the castle in the face of the many appeals she has made. Yet, she has great faith in the castle and believes that its actions can be equated with an attitude of love. Between the two, K develops a feeling for Olga, whose serene peace of mind and faith in the castle depends not on shallowness of insight, but on a firm belief in the existence and effect of love. For K's unconscious world, love and feeling means nothing. In the world of the Unconscious, these things are only the tools of deception and delusion. The world of the Unconscious is also cruel and unmerciful. It can bring the Ego to annihilation.

### **Image of Death in Kafka's The Castle**

In *The Castle*, it is revealed by the image of death. From the very first lines the image of death dominates the novel. It appears in the settings of the story as dark, ambiguous and dim. For instance, the opening lines of the novel are worth paying close attention to:

It was late in the evening when K. arrived. The village was deep in snow. The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. [2]

The fact of the castle being engulfed in snow and mist is reminiscent of another celebrated opening, Dickens's famous description of the equally famous London fog at the beginning of *Bleak House*. [3] The fog is a symbol there of the impenetrable dark and dangerous institution called the Chancery in the Victorian England. Similarly in Kafka also the Castle as a symbol of lifelessness and blind power towers above everyone and everything. Because of it no motion, movement can be seen in the novel. The dominance of the Unconscious under the image of death appears at every place. The story of Sortini and Amalia is another symbol of death. :

One thing about him struck all the people who noticed him at all, the way his forehead was furrowed and there were plenty of them, although he's certainly not more than forty, were spread fan wise over his forehead, running towards the root of his nose. [2]

Another evidence of this is the name of the master Count Westwest. He stands for death for he, like death, is not seen but felt everywhere. This may lead one to speculate on the function of an absentee character like Count Westwest. It appears as if Kafka wants to suggest that if life is a matter of antinomies, life itself cannot exist without death, that life has no possibility of existence in the absence of death! All these images, from the above episode come to our mind from the unconscious. The unconscious world is a place for suppressed wishes, false hopes and the death of longings, which sometimes appear as the images of death, of non-existence. All the images point to a world from which all signs of genuine life have disappeared.

### **The Unconsciousness in Kafka's The Castle**

Now, K knows that the unconscious world he wishes to reach (the castle) retreats from him again into the distance which is not yet worthy of admittance. K should know and feel the terror of his secret intentions which have been suppressed for many years within his Unconscious. The sound of the castle bell reminds him to be awakened at this moment. It is a moment of awakening which is the death of Ego and the awakened state of Unconscious:

The bell's sound changes into a feeble monotonous little tinkle which might have come from the castle, but might have been somewhere in the village. [2]

K, in another episode, remembers his time of childhood within his unconscious, when he walks aimlessly through the village with Barnabas, the castle's ambiguous messenger. He remembers the following scene:

There, too, a church stood in the market place, partly surrounded by an old graveyard, which was again surrounded by a high wall. Very few boys had managed to climb that wall, and for some time K., too, had failed. It was not curiosity, which had urged them on. The graveyard had no mystery to it. They had often entered it through a small wicket-gate. [2]

The episode has a narrative function similar to that of the parable 'Before the Law' in *The Trial*. The parallels to events in *The Castle* are obvious. The most significant aspect of this childhood incident is that K. recalls it at a time of awakening. He looks at the buildings of the castle; he cannot help comparing them with his home-town. What he sees is not so much a castle as

a wretched-looking town, a huddle of village houses, whose sole merit, if any, lay in being built of stone, but the plaster had long since flaked off and the stone seemed to be crumbling away. [2]

"The tower of a house" is related to man's Unconscious, which is unreachable. The barren castle-world appears in the form of K's vague memories which signifies a rootless Unconscious as if the idea of a redeemed world is no more than the product of our frustrated hopes and the memory of such hopes. K.'s problem is how to conquer the realm of the Unconscious. He knows the co-existence of the Ego with the Unconscious is a far-fetched expectation. K is also concerned with making the right kind of existential choice in order to secure total success for his intention of conquering the castle. He knows that there is a real difference between a real village worker and an ostensible village worker. A real village worker is one who is fully integrated into his community, one who is indistinguishable from anybody else in that community. His job and the costumes and practices of his fellow beings are the basis of his existence. But if he becomes an 'ostensible' village worker, he will be a distinctive one. By this choice, he will have an apparent existence of Being (Ego). Apparently, he is a Being.

### **The Protagonist as a Stranger**

The trip or quest towards man's self has no progression. Man is only marching on the same spot, the more he strives, the more he sinks in the mind. His actions are repetitious. He is trapped in a vicious circle, which allows him no way out. In the novel, K introduces himself as a land-surveyor. He claims for what the castle has given him. His persistence in his claims is more significant. When he comes to the village, he finds no place for refuge. No one lets him stay in the village. It is not a usual village. Everything seems strange and unfamiliar and everybody looks at him as a stranger and an outcast: "You are a stranger." [2]

He is a stranger not only to everybody around him but also to his own self. He is like a rootless wanderer on a quest in haunting and sinister atmosphere:

What village is this I have wandered in? Is there a castle here?"

"Most certainly", replied the young man slowly while here and there a head was shaken over K's remark "the castle of my lord the Count Westwest. [2]

K acknowledges this new title given to him. He knows that he is guilty of what his ancestors have done. He is a Jewish wanderer who has been cursed with an everlasting exile as Urizidil [4] says:

But he can neither again entry into the castle nor be accepted in the village. Nobody invites him, nobody throws him out. No one shows him the door, no one detains him. Here is the symbol of Jewry's universal foreignness and loneliness.

Nobody knows from where he has come. He only claims that he is a land-surveyor who has been called by the authority of the castle, Klamm. Nobody believes him. The atmosphere of doubt and ambiguity permeates. The atmosphere also intensifies the ambiguity of his claims. He continues to stake his claim, until two assistants from the castle appear and bring him to the reality of what he claims.

Not until he was up with the landlord, who greeted him humbly, did he notice two men, called Arthur and Jeremiah. [2]

### **Guilt, Silence, Life and Love in *The Castle***

It was the men he had already met. What is obvious from this passage is that Arthur and Jeremiah are not K's assistants. They are the officials from the castle who have been sent to him. The shadow of the self-image in K's mind is significant. This false image of man's quest is a kind of guilt. He pretends to what he really is not. "Why you are not telling the truth. Why you don't tell the truth?": [2]. The truth of his self-examination is a kind of deception in K's world which is to escape from the vague past which is questionable to everybody. He has come

from nowhere. He feels the terror of the sin, guilt and ambiguity in landlady's words of what she talks about. She talks about the authority of Klamm who is compared with an eagle:

Klamm was far way. Once the landlady had compared Klamm to an eagle. He seemed absurd in K's remoteness of the impregnable dwelling of his silence, broken perhaps only by cries such as K had never heard of his wheeling which could never be disturbed by authority that K did down below, which or above he followed at the behest of incomprehensible laws and which only for instants were visible-all these things Klamm and eagle had in common. [2]

The two key words suggestive of Klamm's most distinguishing features are 'remoteness' and 'silence'. The basic characteristic shared by all these authorities is their state of being 'reserved' and 'silent'. This is what makes all these forces look enigmatic and menacing. They are the main reasons for man's fear and anxiety. These unknown forces are the same evil soldiers who are the main reason for stopping man's confession to what he has done in the past. Kafka observes this as a sensual and evil world. He rejects the world of spirituality. He defines the spiritual world as a world of sense itself. There are people who are not satisfied with what they have in the sensual world. K is one of them. He longs for the castle which is the world of spirituality. Perhaps, he can find his salvation or even his suppressed self. Attaining to it through sex, bribery and corruption are the three ways. He tries to establish a contact with the castle through marriage with Frieda who has been Klamm's former mistress. He seduces Frieda for an easy access into the castle and get to Klamm. He sacrifices everyone for the discovery of his self that is inherently sinful. He makes a fool of Frieda by the promise of a future, which is a kind of illusion. In the world of sin, everybody is guilty. It does not have any mercy or does not give anybody a gift of excuse and kindness. Frieda has also been a puppet in the hands of Klamm and K. In this context, Heller [5] remarks:

For K. loves Frieda. If he loves her at all, it is entirely for Klamm's sake. This is not only implied in the whole story of K. and Frieda, but explicitly stated by Kafka in several passages which later detected, very probably because their directness seemed to him incompatible with the mutual meaning of the book. K. wills his love for Frieda because he wills his salvation.

This passage clarifies the nature of love and life for the readers. The readers know that Kafka has employed these equipments to reveal the truth of salvation, sin or even the self itself. For Kafka, life and love are only illusions. The meaning of truth or illusion is defined under the title of lie. The shadow of life does not exist in the world above or in spirituality. When there is no spirituality, salvation for man is only one more deception. In the Kafkaesque world, God means Evil. Thus, salvation has no meaning. If life gives man a chance to exist, it is only for keeping him in suffering and waiting.

The connection of K with Barnabas, Olga and Amalia brings him an awareness of the self, which is inherently sinful. Life gives everybody an opportunity to make choices but never offers total freedom. Man is always entrapped in things. If Barnabas gives the message of Klamm to K, it is only because of his fixation to his job. Or if Olga tries to keep the connection with the castle through self-prostitution, it is because of her help to the family's struggle for rehabilitation. But Amalia's position in this regard is more significant. Amalia's resistance to Sortini's advances may be an act of dignified self-assertion but it does not mean that she is completely independent by it. Contrarily, she is in an exile of complete isolation.

Thus, we come to the conclusion that man's sin never obliterates. The root of this sin is within man's self. He himself is guilty of his own existence. He should submit himself to the authority of non-being, which is death itself. At the end, K accepts what the castle forces him to do. K receives the permission to come to the castle when he is on his deathbed. Perhaps, he can obliterate the trace of guilt within himself through non-being.

## CONCLUSION

In Kafka's *The Castle*, the protagonist does not ultimately succeed in his plan of entering the Castle. And the failure can be laid at his door for two reasons. First, he tries to fit the life of the Castle into his rationalist categories. And secondly he does not allow others to be themselves but uses them for his own purposes thus denying them any individuality which he wants for himself. These faults of his are pointed out to him from time to time in the novel but he refuses to amend his ways. Thus his punishment is that he is left to his own impotent devices and consequently he dies, like Moses, in sight of, but forever outside of, the Promised Land. Kafka's work, thus, embody the predicament of man in an absurd universe trying to make some sense of it. His allegorical and Psychological modes enable him to show the contours of his predicament all the more vividly.

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