

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

The Persistence of Patriarchy in Franz Kafka's "Judgment"

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/52s1g580>

Journal

Orbis Litterarum, 55(2)

ISSN

0105-7510

Author

Pan, David

Publication Date

2000-04-01

DOI

10.1034/j.1600-0730.2000.d01-9.x

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

The Persistence of Patriarchy in Franz Kafka's "Judgment"

David Pan, Washington University, St. Louis, U.S.A.

Though commentators such as Gerhard Neumann have read Kafka's "Judgment" as a critique of patriarchal authority and the tyranny of familial relations, the story's powerful effect originates from the affirmation of patriarchal authority which motivates its plot. The story situates the protagonist in a conflict between the demands of a patriarchal family and a universalist culture outside the family based on friendship. The victory of the father and the resulting death of the son function as part of an attempt to recover traditional structures of authority which have been eroded by a modern notion of culture based on individual freedom and 'elective' affinities rather than binding ones. The death of the son is not an example of senseless repression but of a self-sacrifice of modern and individualist desires in favor of the patriarchal authority of the father.

Kafka and His Critics

In noting that Franz Kafka's "'Judgment' is the only prose work of ten pages in world literature which, though not belonging to a sacred or classical canon, has inspired in the West alone nearly two hundred visible commentaries" (24), Stanley Corngold's proviso concerning sacred or classical canons reveals the possibility that Kafka's story might well be categorized as a narrative which is closer to sacred stories such as legend and myth than to secular forms such as short story or novella. Such a categorization would not only confirm Walter Sokel's argument that Kafka's works are the "presentation of the myth of his inner existence" (24), but also extend this argument concerning the mythic quality of Kafka's stories to account for the scale of reception documented by Corngold. If the myth created by Kafka is not just a private one, but a collective one, having been confirmed by a host of other readers, then Kafka's story might function according to a mechanism which is similar to that of traditional myths and legends.

The key to this mythic quality is the relation between the story and a surrounding context. Evelyn Beck argues that Kafka's story belongs to the Yiddish theater tradition by demonstrating that it is in part based on *God, Man and Devil* by Yakov Gordin (70-97). She notes, however, an important difference between the two works: while the Yiddish play contains a "moral frame for the action" which defines the parameters of the tradition within which it stands, Kafka's story "does not provide an external framework of beliefs to guide us in interpreting the work" (73-4). Yet, this lack might also suggest that the story fits so well into a particular perspective that an explicitly stated framework of beliefs is unnecessary for the story to gain meaning.

Kafka himself indicates the implicit character of an organizing context by insisting in a letter to Felice Bauer that the inner truth of "The Judgment" depends completely upon its reception by each reader or listener:

Aber Du kennst ja noch gar nicht Deine kleine Geschichte [Das Urteil]. Sie ist ein wenig wild und sinnlos und hätte sie nicht innere Wahrheit (was sich niemals allgemein feststellen läßt, sondern immer wieder von jedem Leser oder Hörer von neuem zugegeben oder geleugnet werden muß) sie wäre nichts. (*Briefe an Felice* 156)

By conceiving of inner truth as inseparable from actual reception, Kafka indicates the way in which he would like his story to attain a collective meaning. His story can depend neither upon his own biographical circumstances nor an allegorical context for its truth but upon the experiences of each individual reader or listener. "The Judgment" is a kind of parable, not of meaninglessness as Heinz Politzer has argued (21), but in which the experiential context within which the story gains an aesthetic meaning is the experience of the reader. Instead of providing the context within a framing story, "The Judgment" interacts with the reader's experience in the same way that a myth would. It does not explain the cultural frame, but rather assumes that the proper context already exists for the inner truth of the story to unfold within the reader's experience. Consequently, there should be an intimate relation between the belief system attributed to the implied reader by the story and the views of those who have been driven to comment on it.

Though the authors of the many commentaries do not form a part of any clerical elite, their role in establishing a literary canon in the place of a sacred one suggests that they are bound together by a certain affinity of beliefs nonetheless. The extensive critical reception of Kafka's story indicates that

the critics must share a system of beliefs into which the story fits implicitly, without any explanation. An investigation of the themes of the story and their reception can shed some light, not only on the functioning of the story, but also on the belief systems which act as the implicit context shared by both story and readers.

The situation is complicated, however, by the fact that the story presents the conflict of two opposing perspectives on the action, that of Georg Bendemann and that of his father. While the story opens with a presentation of the events from Georg's modern perspective, the power of the story derives from the sudden change in perspective actuated by Georg's capitulation before his father and the consequent affirmation of his father's patriarchal judgment. The difference between these two perspectives in the story can be summed up as a conflict between kinship and affinity,¹ or patriarchy and partnership, as the fundamental ground of social relations.

The opposition between kinship and affinity places the story within the context of an historical decline of patriarchy in which the reduction of functions carried out by the household has shifted "the family structure from a rigidly hierarchical institution to a partnership of individuals" (Mitterauer and Seider 88). In the resulting modern family "individual self-realization takes precedence over community stability and the careers and happiness of individual members of the family triumph over the continuation of the lineage as a whole" (Shorter 19).

Kafka and his immediate family stood at the crucial turning point in this decline of the patriarchal household. Describing the situation of younger Prague Jews at the close of the nineteenth century, Sander Gilman notes: "Their fathers had moved far from the organized religious beliefs of their grandfathers. Religion had lost its centrality in their life, and their own children came to see the power of all patriarchy as weak" (6). For Bohemian Jews, this decline of patriarchy was a direct result of the political emancipation of Jews in 1849 (Wagnerová 41). While Kafka's grandfather was the last person to be buried in the Jewish cemetery of the village of Osek (42), Kafka's father, though born and raised there, was himself no longer a representative of the older patriarchal order predominant in the countryside, but belonged to a new generation shaped by modernization and emancipation: "Die beiden folgenden Generationen der jüdischen Dorfjugend haben fast ausnahmslos ihre Heimatdörfer verlassen und in den Städten ihr von der großen Welle der Industrialisierung getragenes Glück gesucht – und vielfach

auch gefunden" (42). Located at the end of an Enlightenment tradition in which the bourgeois family drama and the 19th century novel reflected this gradual shift from the primacy of family bonds to "elective affinities," Kafka's "Judgment" reveals the consequences of this development in the depiction of the struggle between Georg Bendemann and his father.

In this conflict between the father's authority and the affinity relation to the friend as determiners of Georg's identity, critics have consistently sided with the friend, equating him with freedom, independence, and literary life as opposed to the patriarchal repression, family dependencies, and narrow-minded beliefs of the father. But as opposed to these critics who in effect read the story as a retelling of bourgeois tragic dramas such as Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, in which the tragic death of the daughter results from a patriarch's misguided attempt to suppress the demands of affinity, Kafka's story opposes the move from patriarchy to affinity, demonstrating instead the necessity of patriarchy and the unavoidability of sacrifice.

The critics' anti-patriarchal view of the story has been able to gain credence because the story presents two contradictory reading contexts by opening with Georg's perspective and closing with the father's. That is to say, on the one hand a traditionalist, patriarchal reader would immediately reject Georg's position at the beginning of the story but concur with the father's at the end. On the other hand, a modern, emancipatory reading would accept Georg's position at the beginning but be unwilling to accept the victory of the father's patriarchal perspective at the end. Thus there are two systems of belief within which the story might function. Though the reader is invited into the story with the first system, the conclusion overthrows it and declares the moral victory of the second.

In attempting to affirm the believability of the suicide and thus the legitimacy of the father's position while also taking the perspective of the son to interpret the events in the story, critics have reproduced the story's double perspective, revealing that they are of two minds when reading it. On the one hand, their intuition of the aesthetic truth of the story and its ending does not allow them to simply dismiss the suicide as absurd and unbelievable. They are compelled to re-read the story and produce another commentary. On the other hand, their modern sympathies do not allow them to affirm the patriarchal perspective which the suicide and their own intuitive acceptance of this ending seem to support.

The resulting anti-patriarchal interpretation of the story has been able to

flourish to the extent that critics have successfully cast the final patriarchal perspective of the story as the object of critique and established Georg's opening perspective as the guiding one, arguing, in Evelyn Beck's words, that "Georg is judged wrong for actions that are essentially natural and normal" (80). From the son's point of view, the father can be portrayed, by Kate Flores, for instance, as "a brooding, embittered, self-involved old male, self-important, self-righteous, self-pitying" ('The Pathos' 268) and by Elizabeth Boa as "an undecidable amalgam between a dirty old man and a megalomaniac baby" (119). Likewise, Gerhard Neumann reads the son's rebellion as an "emanzipativer Akt im Kontext der Familie" (80). Emancipation and independence become the ideals around which the critics' perspective is organized, and they see affinity, because it depends upon personally felt interests and desires, as a legitimate counter to a patriarchal authority based on such justifications as blood ties and a blind respect for tradition. For Neumann, Georg is "eine Gestalt, die sich aus den Abhängigkeiten innerhalb der Familie in die Konfiguration des Berufs und der sexuellen Partnerschaft (Heirat) zu retten versucht" (144). The goal of personal fulfillment retains an emancipatory glow in the confrontation with a patriarchal authority; and because "elective affinities" take precedence over "dependencies" in the pursuit of happiness, the father's attempts to reassert the primacy of family ties appear as the unjust transformation of a rational discussion into a power struggle. According to Neumann (78, 85), Flores ("The Pathos" 263–71), and Boa, the father wages psychological warfare against his son and is not the embodiment of "law or morality, but of power" (Boa 119).

Even critics, such as Claude-Edmonde Magny (81–85), John Ellis (90–1), J. P. Stern (129), and Charles Bernheimer (147–9), who recognize and criticize Georg's narcissism, are unable to take up the father's perspective. Failing to recognize the principle of friendship as the basis of Georg's narcissism, they explain it purely in terms of Georg's inner psychological deficiencies. As a consequence, though they criticize Georg's opening perspective, they still consider it to be a personal one rather than a general one summed up in the principle of affinity. The father cannot provide a valid position from which to interpret the events in the story, but remains for them "cruel and tyrannical" (Bernheimer 158), "power-corrupted" (Stern 130), or simply "insane" (Magny 84). Ellis has the most positive assessment of the father as the figure which "brings reality into Georg's world" (88), but even here there is no recognition of the specificity of the father's patriarchal perspective.

Because they cannot defend or even articulate the father's position, these interpreters of the story have placed themselves in the difficult position of having to explain the necessity of Georg's suicide while at the same time repudiating the notion of patriarchal authority which the suicide affirms. They inevitably fail to provide an adequate explanation for the suicide. Neumann, for instance, admits openly that he is unable to answer on the level of the story's dynamics the question of "warum Georg nicht den Weg nach draußen wählt, den sein zweites Selbst, als das er ja den Freund auffassen könnte, ihm bahnt, sondern sich durch den Suizid aus der ausweglosen Familiensituation herausstiehlt" (144). Unable to comprehend Georg's actions, Neumann has planned an escape route for him, smoothed by personal interests in career and sexual partnerships, paved by the friend, and leading to the rejection of family bonds through emigration.²

Though Neumann provides no answer for why Georg himself was unable to make this escape, interpretations based on Kafka's biography invent an escape out of the family into literary life by arguing that the story is not so much about Georg's death as about Kafka's birth as a writer. Developing an argument first made by Flores ("The Judgment" 14–16), Corngold reads the friend as a symbol for writing and the story as a depiction of a biographical conflict between family and writing in which Kafka had to give up family in order to pursue his writing career (35–43). Similarly, for Anderson "Georg Bendemann plunges to his death, but the gymnast-writer comes to life" (89, 185–189), and for Boa "paternal triumph within the fictional world cannot compare with the final victory of the author" (119). That is, Kafka's own personal biography provides the model which Georg must follow. Such explanations based on Kafka's biography are insufficient, however, for they do not account for the fascination of the story for a wider audience (Ellis 75).³

Elaborating on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's reading in which patriarchy is simply a mask for an alienating modernity (11–12), Richard T. Gray's interpretation takes a more sociological approach to the story by reading the father's patriarchal position as "the center of this network of infinite commercial-sexual-social-discursive intercourse" (303). Gray depends upon Max Horkheimer's essay "Authority and the Family" in order to equate patriarchy with the alienating structures of modernity, and his reading is similar to earlier interpretations in that all are failed attempts at finding the utopian escape from patriarchy which the story does not provide.

Gray's major theoretical premise, that patriarchy and bourgeois social

structure are simply two aspects of the same modern alienation, is undermined by recent research which has demonstrated "that modern society is to be distinguished from older social formations by the fact that it has become more elaborate in two ways: it affords more opportunities both for impersonal and for more intensive personal relationships" (Luhmann 12). Rather than allying itself with patriarchy and suppressing the individual, the alienation and impersonal workings of the modern world have led to an intensification of the "personal element in social relationships" (13). This modern intensification of the personal contrasts with a patriarchal situation of fixed social roles and loyalties to the extent that in the modern bourgeois family "more of the individual, unique attributes of each person, or ultimately all their characteristics, become significant" (13). Modernity is not allied with patriarchy, but with the emancipation of the individual.

This modern emancipation of the individual is the source of Georg's narcissism in "The Judgment." Yet Gray's dependence on Horkheimer's work leads him to consider Georg's narcissism as a sign, not of a commitment to affinity and individuality, but of patriarchal tendencies. Gray depicts the friend on the other hand as a symbol of a "'reserve sphere' of utopian resistance" (307). Gray's understanding of "Georg as merchant and the friend as Georg's repressed opposition to bourgeois commercial practice" is flawed to the extent that Georg and the friend are in fact both merchants and, up until the engagement, have made very similar choices in their lives by generally choosing to pursue personal and career growth rather than submit to family obligations (310). This similarity only changes with Georg's decision to marry. The differences between them before the engagement do not reflect opposing character traits but consist merely of the circumstances which have led to Georg's success and the friend's failure in career and social relationships.

As opposed to the patriarchal perspective of the father, the principle of affinity embodied in the friend is the true ally of "abstract and systematic networks" because the friend's life decisions have consistently freed him from any family constraints which would hinder "the development of those potentials unique to the given individual" (Gray 291). By placing emphasis on the traits of individuals rather than fixed social roles for determining identity, the principle of affinity carries out the atomization which is the prerequisite for the functioning of abstract networks. By contrast, the fixed roles and sacrifices demanded by patriarchy bind the individual into a collective which can

provide a counter to the abstract impersonal networks of modernity. Patriarchy and bourgeois intercourse are not part of the same logic but are opposing systems, embodied in the story in the father and the friend.

Walter Sokel's interpretation stands out as the only significant attempt to articulate the father's patriarchal perspective as a substantive alternative to Georg and the friend's. In his reading, the story is dominated by a "duality of perspectives" stemming from a "division within Georg between his 'natural' wish to assert his ego at his father's expense and his original self which lived in love and approval of his parents" ("Perspectives" 211). Equating Georg's assertion of his ego with his economic aspect, Sokel differentiates it from the spiritual aspect of the self embodied in both the friend and the father and reads the story as a vindication of the latter (199–200, 220–1). "In Kafka's world, natural man, who is identical with economic man, stands condemned by the paternal perspective" (210). The suicide at the end of the story thus presents Georg's rejection of an ego-centered materiality and a return to his childhood self, centered on spirituality and a love for his parents. Georg considers his suicide to be "an atonement and therewith a symbolic reinstatement of the original harmony that, in agreement with the structure of tragedy, can only be achieved at the price of death" (231).

Sokel claims on the one hand that the suicide is an affirmation of the collective through the sacrifice of the individual (232), suggesting that the story's ending affirms the patriarchal perspective. Yet he argues on the other hand that the ideal which is affirmed by the suicide is not patriarchal (the son does not become a father), but rather infantile: "He is, Georg seems to say and proves it by his obedient suicide, in his fundamental essence a loving innocent child" (231). In the end, this reading of the story as an affirmation of infantility is a roundabout way of arriving at Neumann and Boa's reading of the story as a critique of family structures. Like Neumann, Sokel concludes that the logic of the family maintains the son in a subordinate, immature position and that the only possible escape from this dilemma is the path of the friend, who he reads as the embodiment of childhood immaturity (201), away from the family: "The friend showed a possible way out which Georg chose not to follow" (196). Though Sokel claims to show how the father's perspective is the "true" one in the story (211), he in fact ends up legitimating the friend's immaturity against the patriarchal perspective of father and family. He is led to this undermining of his own claims by his decision to read the alliance of friend with father in the story as a sign of the

identity of their perspectives (209). By obscuring the opposition between friend and father in the story, Sokel's interpretation misreads the cause of the bifurcation in Georg's self.

The primary opposition of the story is not one between economic and spiritual self, nor between adulthood and childhood, as Sokel suggests, nor even between the son and the father, but between friendship and fatherhood, each claiming against the other to establish a foundation for all social relations. The necessity of Georg's suicide is grounded in the necessity of the father's perspective, according to which the emancipatory move toward personal independence, either in social relationships or in literary life, can only be accomplished through an abandonment of family bonds in favor of shared affinities as determiners of social interaction. The story shows that this move from kinship to affinity leads inevitably to the weakening of the ethics of loyalty and sacrifice upon which all social bonds must be based. Rather than the emancipatory perspective of the critics, which insists on the possibility of a liberation from patriarchal authority through a recourse to affinity in relationships and individual achievements in intellectual life, the story embraces a traditionalist perspective, which emphasizes the necessity of sacrifice and limitations on individual desires for maintaining social cohesion.

Friends or Family

While previous readings of "The Judgment" have depended on symbolic interpretations in order to relate the friend to writing or to Georg's inner self, a non-symbolic, literal reading leads to the conclusion that the bachelor friend does not simply symbolize but embodies in his life decisions the principle of friendship which is opposed to patriarchy in the story.⁴ Georg himself describes the hostile relationship between friendship and kinship in his description of his friend's "dry" response to the death of Georg's mother: "Von dem Todesfall von Georgs Mutter ... hatte der Freund wohl noch erfahren und sein Beileid in einem Brief mit einer Trockenheit ausgedrückt, die ihren Grund nur darin haben konnte, daß die Trauer über ein solches Ereignis in der Fremde ganz unvorstellbar wird" (24). Georg imputes to the friend an inability to comprehend the significance of family relations and blames this inability on the fact that the friend is far away, in a distant land. Emigration to a foreign country, that is, the opening to new experiences and other cultures, is interpreted by Georg as an under-rating of kinship and the cause of an act of impiety.

In Georg's depiction of the friend, this insensitivity to parental and family bonds extends to all aspects of his situation. The sphere of the friend is so alienated from family bonds that the enumeration of possible courses of action for the friend omits any mention of family relations that he might have. Instead, the point of his return home would be: "alle die alten freundschaftlichen Beziehungen wieder aufzunehmen – wofür ja kein Hindernis bestand – und im übrigen auf die Hilfe der Freunde zu vertrauen" (23). This figure, with no other designation than "einen sich im Ausland befindenden Jugendfreund" (23), is indeed reduced by Georg to nothing but a friend, his social existence totally defined in terms of affinity relations.

The importance of the friend for Georg's identity is the result of his similar strategy of using affinity as a way of escaping kinship ties and becoming independent of his father. By forming friendships, he is able to establish his own identity based on his particular interests. As the narrator emphasizes, rather than maintaining contact with his father, it was generally the case that Georg: "mit Freunden beisammen war oder jetzt seine Braut besuchte" (26). Georg's separation from his father is intimately connected with the growing importance of his relations with his friends and fiancée. By forming such relationships based on affinity, Georg is able to establish his own identity based on his particular interests. The principle of affinity then serves, not just as an excuse, but a justification for a growing distance from the father.⁵

The opposition between friends and family leads to Georg's attempts to isolate these two realms of his life from contact with each other. When writing to his friend, he does not tell of his engagement but rather tries to maintain an image of himself which is filtered of any intrusions from the familial realm:

Er wollte nichts anderes, als die Vorstellung ungestört lassen, die sich der Freund von der Heimatstadt in der langen Zwischenzeit wohl gemacht und mit welcher er sich abgefunden hatte. So geschah es Georg, daß er dem Freund die Verlobung eines gleichgültigen Menschen mit einem ebenso gleichgültigen Mädchen dreimal in ziemlich weit auseinanderliegenden Briefen anzeigte, bis sich dann allerdings der Freund, ganz gegen Georgs Absicht, für diese Merkwürdigkeit zu interessieren begann.

Georg schrieb ihm aber solche Dinge viel lieber, als daß er zugestanden hätte, daß er selbst vor einem Monat mit einem Fräulein Frieda Brandenfeld, einem Mädchen aus wohlhabender Familie, sich verlobt hatte. (25)

Georg's perception of the tension between friendship and the family relations to be established by the marriage forces him to deny his own engagement

three times when writing to the friend. Yet, even the mention of engagement attracts the friend's attention. Likewise, in response to his father's antipathy toward the friend, Georg also chooses to deny the friend's existence "at least two times" in the father's household: "jetzt wird es bald drei Jahre her sein, da war ja mein Freund bei uns zu Besuch. Ich erinnere mich noch, daß du ihn nicht besonders gern hattest. Wenigstens zweimal habe ich ihn vor dir verleugnet, trotzdem er gerade bei mir im Zimmer saß" (28). Georg's denials – on the one hand of the friend to the father and on the other hand of the engagement to the friend – illustrate the split in his own identity between kinship and affinity relations, each adhering to a logic which excludes the legitimacy of the other.

Up until the time of the engagement, Georg uses the ties to his friends to justify his distance from his father. But this justification is compromised with the engagement as Georg realizes the precariousness of the friend's existence and must consequently face up to the unreliability of affinity. The friend's weak family consciousness cannot be compensated by friendship bonds, and, as Georg points out, the friend's return could very well lead to a situation in which he finds that his friendships can no longer help him:

Folgte er aber wirklich dem Rat und würde hier – natürlich nicht mit Absicht, aber durch die Tatsachen – niedergedrückt, fände sich nicht in seinen Freunden und nicht ohne sie zurecht, litte an Beschämung, hätte jetzt wirklich keine Heimat und keine Freunde mehr, war es da nicht viel besser für ihn, er blieb in der Fremde, so wie er war? (24)

The dependence of friendship on affinity means that the friend could find himself friendless once the affinities dissolve. And because he only exists as a friend and has no recourse to kinship relations, the dissolution of friendships would also mean an irredeemable homelessness. Moreover, to the extent that Georg himself depends on affinity relations to maintain his identity, he could find himself in the same situation.

The potential "friendlessness" of the friend demonstrates the transitory character of Georg's relation to him and the implicit narcissism of an identity based on such friendships.⁶ As becomes clear from his ruminations about the proper way to present himself to his friend in his letters, the friendship depends upon an affinity of thoughts, interests, and behaviors in order to maintain itself. Once Georg's situation begins to deviate from that of his friend's, he runs the risk of losing him, "natürlich nicht mit Absicht, aber durch die Tatsachen" (24). This potential loss is a characteristic of his approach to

friendships. Because it is based on affinity, it can also fall victim to changes in affinities. As Georg recounts the differences in their business and personal fortunes, he is also enumerating the reasons for the dissolution of his ties to the friend in order to justify his consequent attempt “to free himself from this friendship, to repudiate it by moving away, into married life” (Stern 124). Though Georg is unconscious of the betrayal inherent in such an “emancipation,” his concern over the letter indicates his intuition of this betrayal.

The Engagement

The opposition between affinity and kinship is expressed as an opposition between Georg’s and his father’s divergent interpretations of the friend’s ability to provide a counterweight to the father’s authority. But because the story does not directly depict the situation of the friend, only making him visible through the eyes of Georg or of his father, the friend is not an independent character, but acts as the mediator of the conflict between father and son. As Kafka notes in his interpretation of the story:

Der Freund ist kaum eine wirkliche Person, er ist vielleicht eher das, was dem Vater und Georg gemeinsam ist. Die Geschichte ist vielleicht ein Rundgang um Vater und Sohn, und die wechselnde Gestalt des Freundes ist vielleicht der perspektivische Wechsel der Beziehungen zwischen Vater und Sohn. Sicher bin ich dessen aber auch nicht. (*Briefe an Felice* 396–7)

By placing the friend at the center of the conflict between father and son, Kafka sets up this conflict as a struggle concerning the status of friendship in social relations. But in depicting the friend as absent, the story already implicitly emphasizes the primacy of the father over the friend.⁷ Yet, it is Georg himself who establishes this primacy by deciding, first, to reject his friend’s invitation to go to Russia, then to become engaged, and then to consult his father about the announcement of the engagement to the friend. The re-emergence of patriarchal authority in the course of the discussion about the friend is not a result of the father’s rhetorical power, as Neumann suggests (78, 85), but of Georg’s own actions.

Georg’s engagement triggers the crisis of the story because it can be understood either as a kinship relation or a relation of affinity, depending on whether patriarchy or partnership is used as the model for the family.⁸ Kafka notes this ambiguity in his description of the role of the bride in the story: “Georg hat nichts; die Braut, die in der Geschichte nur durch die Beziehung

zum Freund, also zum Gemeinsamen, lebt, und die, da eben noch nicht Hochzeit war, in den Blutkreis, der sich um Vater und Sohn zieht, nicht eintreten kann, wird vom Vater leicht vertrieben" (*Tagebücher* 186). Though the bride exists through the relationship to the friend and is thus related by affinity to Georg, who is attempting to escape the relationship to the father defined by blood, Kafka suggests that the bride could potentially exist in the story after the marriage as a blood relation like the father.

Kafka's interpretation clearly delineates the major conflict in the story as the opposition between affinity relations ("relation to the friend") and kinship relations ("circle of blood relationship"), but fails to indicate how the bride's proximity to kinship relations makes her a potential ally of the father as well. She fills this role when she insists that Georg announce their marriage to his friend: "Wenn du solche Freunde hast, Georg, hättest du dich überhaupt nicht verloben sollen" (25). His bride wants to be sure that Georg will be breaking with affinity bonds by marrying, and not extending such bonds into the marriage relationship and treating her not as an inescapable blood relation but as a "friend," subject to the same vagaries of affinity that have led to the abandonment of the friend in Russia.

Georg, meanwhile, seeks to maintain both the significance of the friendship and the marriage simultaneously. The only way to do this is to pull the marriage into the realm of affinity relations through an impossible balancing act. In order to emancipate himself from the friend and not be subject to the same fickleness of affinities as the friend, Georg becomes engaged. But in order to keep his distance from the constraints of kinship ties, he attempts to maintain the relation to the friend. Rather than becoming a patriarch, Georg will attempt to remain a partner to his bride. He will not define her purely in terms of her role as bride. Rather, she will remain an individual with the only other proper name in the story, Frieda Brandenfeld. The bride, however, seeing the ambivalence in Georg's position, insists that Georg clearly subordinate his friendship to his marriage by writing to the friend about the engagement, thereby declaring the primacy of kinship.

Because the bride is a double character, potentially existing either as a friend or a blood relation, her attempt to force Georg to choose between these two possibilities initiates the change in perspective leading to his condemnation. The announcement of the engagement to the friend is a declaration of the end of his relationship based on friendship and a movement toward an alternative understanding of identity which is based on kinship

rather than affinity. His hesitation in writing to his friend stems from a reluctance to make the break with friendship and embrace his bride as a family member, and his need to consult his father demonstrates his consciousness of the opposition between friend and father and of the identity-constituting consequences of his letter. In spite of his attempt to adhere to affinity bonds, the engagement forces him to move in the direction of kinship relations.

Yet, the possible reaffirmation of kinship in the marriage relation means that Georg is returning to the sphere of his father, but this time without the support of the friend. In telling the father that he has written a letter to the friend announcing his engagement, Georg admits the distance between himself and the friend which resulted in the earlier false letters. The power of the father's condemnation derives from this admission. In taking advantage of this distance to definitively separate himself from the friend through the engagement, Georg demonstrates the weakness of his affinity relations and allows the father to claim the friend as an ally following Georg's betrayal.

Kinship vs. Affinity

During Georg's confrontation with his father, the crucial issue is whether affinity or kinship should serve as the model for determining all social relations. With the writing of the letter, Georg abandons his attempt to maintain friendship and family as two separate spheres. Yet in spite of this dissolution of his friendship he still tries to maintain his position against the father during their confrontation by reinterpreting kinship in terms of affinity.

Instead of hiding the friend from the father, Georg now tries to integrate the father into his circle of friends, and his attempt to prove the existence of the friend to his father is an attempt to demonstrate the importance of affinity, not only for himself but for the father's relation to the friend as well. Georg recounts how his father's initial dislike for the friend was eventually replaced by a growing affinity:

Ich konnte ja deine Abneigung gegen ihn ganz gut verstehn, mein Freund hat seine Eigentümlichkeiten. Aber dann hast du dich doch auch wieder ganz gut mit ihm unterhalten. Ich war damals noch so stolz darauf, daß du ihm zuhörtest, nicktest und fragtest. Wenn du nachdenkst, mußst du dich erinnern. Er erzählte damals unglaubliche Geschichten von der russischen Revolution. Wie er z. B. auf einer Geschäftsreise in Kiew bei einem Tumult einen Geistlichen auf einem Balkon gesehen hatte, der sich ein breites Blutkreuz in die flache Hand

schnitt, diese Hand erhob und die Menge anrief. Du hast ja selbst diese Geschichte hie und da wiedererzählt. (28–9)

The point of Georg's account of the friend is to show, not just the existence of the friend, but the importance of affinity itself. In his account, Georg is especially proud that the father began to "get on with" the friend, even to the point of repeating the friend's story. Thus Georg does not fear an alliance between friend and father as long as this alliance is founded upon the principle of affinity.

Yet, Georg's insistence on the fact of the father's repetition of the story of the priest in Kiev overlooks the true basis of the new alliance between father and friend. As John White notes, the "episode with the cross of blood involves motifs of self-imposed suffering, linked, by the crucifixion overtone, with martyrdom, and publicly displayed self-sacrifice" (103). The idea of sacrifice has remained foreign to Georg's concept of friendship. For in rejecting the friend's invitation to go to Russia on the basis of his present financial success, Georg does not even consider the possibility of moving to Russia out of solidarity with his friend but instead virtually ridicules his friend's invitation on the basis of business figures (24–5).

Georg's attempt to argue for the significance of affinity bonds only succeeds in demonstrating the hitherto hidden relation between the friend and the father with regard to the issue of sacrifice. But this relation does not serve Georg's attempt to establish affinity as a guiding principle for the relation of friend to father. Rather, the friend and the father resemble each other only to the extent that they both defend sacrifice against the ephemerality and egotism of affinity relations. Not only do they voice their admiration for self-sacrifice in their recounting of the story of the priest, they are both victims of Georg's lack of a sense of sacrifice. For while their situations have both declined in comparison with Georg's, Georg does not attempt to aid them, but rather merely seems to revel in his successes.⁹

In maintaining an attitude of superiority and independence toward both friend and father, Georg assumes a paternal role and treats them like children. At first, this move might be considered an embracing of kinship bonds, and indeed when the father doubts the existence of the friend in Russia, Georg reacts by insisting: "Tausend Freunde ersetzen mir nicht meinen Vater" (28). Georg attempts to deny that he has been cultivating friendships whose purpose is to replace his father as the center of authority. But as Ellis has shown (87), Georg's concern for his father's health at this point and his

attempt to put his father to bed are thinly disguised attempts to declare his father to be helpless and take over his position of authority.¹⁰ Significantly, Georg's exaggerated concern for his father's darkened room and closed window comes immediately after his first thought to himself that "mein Vater ist immer noch ein Riese" (26), revealing that the obsession with the father's strength is coupled with the attempt to demonstrate his weakness and senility.

Rather than accepting the importance of kinship roles, Georg attempts to manipulate kinship now that they might be advantageous to him. He is able to do this only because of his engagement, which will potentially found a new household in which Georg will be in control. In attempting to take over kinship bonds, Georg treats such bonds as if they were as malleable as affinities, using his engagement as an assertion of his right to "cover up" the father and assume the role of patriarch, thus implicitly voicing the death wish noted by many critics in his phrase: "wenn er fiele und zerschmetterte!" (31). After the marriage, Georg plans to establish his power either by moving out of the parental home and setting up his own household, whereby "der Vater allein in der alten Wohnung bleiben würde," or bringing his father along into "seinen künftigen Haushalt" (29), where Georg would be in charge. It is not the father, but Georg, who transforms the discussion with the father into a power struggle by attempting to manipulate and overturn the social roles dictated by kinship.

But it is this very attempt to assume a paternal role which reveals to Georg how his adherence to affinity as the organizer of his relationships has led to the abandonment of both friend and father as his own situation changes and he acquires new friends and a fiancée. Due to their abandonment, both have more in common with each other than with Georg. But this means that the affinity bonds which Georg sought to use against the traditional blood ties of the father have been revealed as non-binding. The alliance of father and friend against Georg is not based on affinity but the collapse of affinity actuated by Georg's abandonment of both. In the end, bonds of affinity are not bonds at all, but the rejection of bonds in favor of temporary "elective" affinities.

The fickleness of affinity makes Georg susceptible to the accusations of his father. In his depiction of the friend as closer to himself than to Georg, the father does not accede to Georg's interpretation in which relationships are based on affinity. Rather, he pulls the friend into the realm of kinship relations: "Wohl kenne ich deinen Freund. Er wäre ein Sohn nach meinem

Herzen" (29). The justification for his relation to the friend is based on the logic of kinship rather than affinity, and loyalty, betrayal, and sacrifice become the key terms.

Consequently, the father describes his alliance with the friend as a result, not of a set of common interests, but of a shared situation of having been betrayed by Georg.¹¹ After claiming that he has been the friend's "Vertreter hier am Ort," the father takes up Georg's comment that he has been a "Komödiant," a comedian or role-player, in order to demonstrate that social roles (e.g. friend, father, son), not common interests and affinities, determine identity. After Georg's betrayal, the father's role as representative of the friend was the only thing he had left once Georg abandons kinship for affinity: "was blieb mir übrig, in meinem Hinterzimmer, verfolgt vom ungetreuen Personal, alt bis in die Knochen?" (30–1). But in becoming the representative of the friend, the father demonstrates the consequences of Georg's embracing of affinity as a substitute for kinship. Rather than transforming all social relations into affinity relations, Georg's dependence on friendship has in fact transformed the role of friend into something which must carry the same weight that a family relation normally has. But in this case, his relations with the friend must begin to reproduce the logic of kinship, where sacrifice and betrayal rather than interests and affinities are the crucial issues.

The merging of friend and father is not a universalization of affinity as Georg wishes, but of kinship. Instead of being united by common interests, they ally on the basis of a common situation of betrayal, the father gradually assuming the same linguistic position as the friend during the father's monologue:

Darum hast du ihn auch betrogen die ganzen Jahre lang. Warum sonst? Glaubst du, ich habe nicht um ihn geweint? Darum doch sperrst du dich in dein Bureau, niemand soll stören, der Chef ist beschäftigt – nur damit du deine falschen Briefchen nach Rußland schreiben kannst. Aber den Vater muß glücklicherweise niemand lehren, den Sohn zu durchschauen. Wie du jetzt geglaubt hast, du hättest ihn untergekriegt, so untergekriegt, daß du dich mit deinem Hintern auf ihn setzen kannst und er rührt sich nicht, da hat sich mein Herr Sohn zum Heiraten entschlossen! (29–30)

By the end of this passage, the role of the friend begins to merge with that of the father, and it is unclear to whom the final sentence in the above citation refers. Though at first glance the "er" of "er rührt sich nicht" seems to refer to the friend, the antecedent is actually "den Vater" from the previous sentence. The "er" can refer to either the father or the friend,¹² and the two figures occupy the same grammatical position just as they fill the same social

role for Georg, merging in Georg's consciousness in the passage which immediately follows. When looking up at his father, Georg in fact sees a vision of his friend:

Georg sah zum Schreckbild seines Vaters auf. Der Petersburger Freund, den der Vater plötzlich so gut kannte, ergriff ihn, wie noch nie. Verloren im weiten Rußland sah er ihn. An der Türe des leeren, ausgeraubten Geschäftes sah er ihn. Zwischen den Trümmern der Regale, den zeretzten Waren, den fallenden Gasarmen stand er gerade noch. Warum hatte er so weit wegfahren müssen!
(30)

This merging in Georg's consciousness of the image of the friend's abandonment with the vision of his father demonstrates that Georg's relation to his friend has not followed a different logic than the relation to his father, but has reenacted it, and his attempt to escape from kinship bonds by means of friendships has led him back into the same difficulties he faced in his familial relations. The "kinship" alliance of father and friend demonstrates that Georg's rejection of family bonds in favor of affinity bonds does not establish a new basis for social relations, but is merely a flight from binding commitments. Affinity reveals itself as an illusory substitute for kinship as a basis for social bonds.

By this point in the story, Georg's power can no longer support his attempts to ridicule his father with remarks such as "Komödiant!" or "Sogar im Hemd hat er Taschen!" or "Zehntausendmal!" (30–1). Such attempts at ridicule could only function if others were to support Georg's affinity-based outlook, these others constructing a community context for his words which would challenge the father's interpretation of the events. But Georg's abandonment of kinship and then of his friend has left him isolated in confronting his father. His words are immediately turned against him, at first by the father: "Ja, freilich habe ich Komödie gespielt! Komödie! Gutes Wort!" and later by himself: "aber noch in seinem Munde bekam das Wort einen toternsten Klang" (30–31). For by this time, as Kafka notes,

Das Gemeinsame ist alles um den Vater aufgetürmt, Georg fühlt es nur als Fremdes, Selbständig-Gewordenes, von ihm niemals genug Beschütztes, russischen Revolutionen Ausgesetztes, und nur weil er selbst nichts mehr hat als den Blick auf den Vater, wirkt das Urteil, das ihm den Vater gänzlich verschließt, so stark auf ihn. (*Tagebücher* 186)

The father does not subjugate Georg. Rather, he demonstrates to Georg how his own actions have led to his present isolation. From the father's perspec-

tive, Georg's accomplishments are not a result of his independence and ability, but depend on the loyalty and sacrifice of others. Georg's letter is a first dawning realization that his alienation both from the friend and the father is a result of an inability to put his own interests behind loyalties to others: "Jetzt weißt du also, was es noch außer dir gab, bisher wußtest du nur von dir!" (32). His independence is not a sign of adulthood, but of a childish abandonment of responsibilities toward others. "Ein unschuldiges Kind" in his naive belief in his own independence and accomplishments, Georg is nevertheless "ein teuflischer Mensch" in his inability to understand that his affirmation of independence was simultaneously an abandonment of those to whom he owes his independent existence (32). It is consequently only fitting that the father derives his strength from the loyalty of those others who have been betrayed by Georg: "Allein hätte ich vielleicht zurückweichen müssen, aber so hat mir die Mutter ihre Kraft abgegeben, mit deinem Freund habe ich mich herrlich verbunden, deine Kundschaft habe ich hier in der Tasche!" (31). Emancipation and independence turn out to be characteristics of childhood and immaturity while sacrifice and loyalty are the traits of adulthood. Georg only becomes mature when he is able to sacrifice himself for others. As Sokel has pointed out, the suicide at the end of the "The Judgment" presents Georg's return to his parents through sacrifice (*Tragik* 63).

But Georg's suicide is not a return to harmony nor to childhood as Sokel further claims (*Tragik* 63, 72), but the expression of a contradiction and of his adulthood. As his father notes before condemning Georg: "Wie lange hast du gezögert ehe du reif geworden bist!" (31). With this phrase, the father affirms that Georg has now reached maturity and realized the significance of sacrifice for forming social bonds. Yet, this maturity also means that Georg is now ready to carry out the father's verdict. The condemnation can only take effect once Georg has finally grown up and recognized that the foundation of social relations is not affinity nor the biological fact of blood, but the experience of sacrifice. Georg's execution of the verdict is the only valid proof of his repentance. Through his suicide, Georg demonstrates that he now recognizes something outside of and greater than himself. This affirmation of that which goes beyond material well-being can only be accomplished through an act of self-sacrifice. Not in a fit of helpless insanity, but with the clarity and bodily control of "der ausgezeichnete Turner, der er in seinen Jugendjahren zum Stolz seiner Eltern gewesen war" (32), Georg subordinates

his physical well-being to a higher goal. This goal is a patriarchal one in the story. But as Kate Flores has suggested (“The Pathos” 259–60), patriarchy emerges here as a system of discipline whose purpose is not the domination of women but of men, suppressing freedom in favor of loyalty, self-interest in favor of self-sacrifice, thus transforming bachelors into fathers.

Myth and Context

As clear and unequivocal this conclusion appears at the end of the story, it is drowned out by the intervening onrush of modernity, passing over Georg’s sacrifice in “ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr” (32). The story’s final invocation of this traffic already recognizes that its vindication of patriarchy is perhaps futile, the collapse of the father after pronouncing the judgment underlining the extent to which Georg’s failure is the father’s failure as well. Both stand condemned to insignificance in the face of a modernity which seeks to eliminate traditional bonds. If the project of modernity can be characterized as an attempt to escape the irresolvable contradictions of myth, it operates through the ideal of affinity, traffic and circulation being the means by which affinity operates to suppress the demands of kinship and the workings of sacrifice.

Kafka’s project, however, has consisted of a return to the contradictions of kinship and their irresolvability. The final sacrifice of the protagonist recreates the structure of tragic myth, and the contradictions of Kafka’s stories are thus mythic ones rather than modern ones. But by eliminating any doctrine that might accompany the story, Kafka depends upon the aesthetic effect in order to create a mythic art.

Though Kafka’s story cannot be designated as a true myth belonging to an oral tradition passed down through several generations (Kirk 57), it attempts to imitate and to reenact in literature a traditional oral tale. The result is that the plots, themes, and formal structures of “The Judgment” are similar to those of the myths described by Claude Lévi-Strauss (216–19). “The Judgment” achieves its mythic status neither through religious dogma nor a prior system of belief nor a set of rituals. Instead it depends upon the ability of its images and structures to mimic the essential forces which define the experience of the audience. As Lévi-Strauss writes concerning the Oedipus myth: “Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true” (216). The

'truth' of the story does not derive from any particular moral or teaching, but rather in its ability to recapitulate to a collective a contradiction which shapes its experience. To the extent that the contradictions of kinship still resonate within the audience, "The Judgment" will remain a compelling story and object of study.

In order to make the contradiction between kinship and affinity tangible, "The Judgment" employs the friend in Russia as an intermediary figure which becomes the site of conflict and defines the issues. The conflict between kinship and affinity is conducted as a battle between varying interpretations of the meaning of the friend, who functions as what Lévi-Strauss calls a mediator (224). Like the coyote of American Indian myths,¹³ the friend mediates an intractable conflict between father and son. Just as the friend is necessary in order for father and son to interact with each other, this friend is also necessary for the reader to perceive the issues involved in the conflict. All of the concerns and perspectives which impact upon it have been merged into the single figure of the friend. The resulting work of art makes a set of intangible relations into something tangible which can be collectively viewed and discussed. In the same way that Lévi-Strauss describes how the mediator serves to embody, but never truly resolve, an unbridgeable contradiction (229), the friend in Russia is unable to defuse the contradiction between cultures which lies at the root of the story. Rather, the changing perspectives on the mediator define the irreconcilability of the oppositions.

The plot structure belongs to the myth of Oedipus, which according to Lévi-Strauss comprises not just the classical Greek versions, but all the known versions which have been documented in different cultures throughout the world (218). In his reading of the Oedipal myth, he notes a basic contradiction between an underemphasis and an overemphasis of kinship bonds: "the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it" (216). As in Lévi-Strauss's schema, Georg underemphasizes kinship bonds by seeking independence from his parents in his decision to marry. This underemphasis is placed in opposition to the parents' overemphasis of such bonds, and this conflict is in turn repeated in the opposition between a local (autochthonous) culture and a foreign culture: the father/son conflict is inseparable from the situation of the friend who has abandoned his homeland to settle in Russia.

The intertwining of the generational struggle with the cross-cultural

conflict indicates a fundamental congruence between the kinship/affinity conflict and the opposition between autochthony and mobility. Kinship is related to autochthony and affinity is related to mobility because the conflict between the local and the foreign must be negotiated with every marriage bond. Because every marriage involves a union between two separate families, it becomes a potential crisis point, presenting both a threat and an opportunity to the local culture of each family's kinship group. Coupled to the threat of the dissolution of generational ties and commitments is an opportunity for generational renewal and adaptation.

But as the Oedipal myth in general and Kafka's story in particular demonstrate, the attempt to completely escape a local culture ultimately ends in disaster. The bridging of cultures can only be dealt with through sacrifice in order to maintain the primacy of kinship as the determiner of social bonds in spite of the continuing demands of affinity. The centrality of contradiction in myth thus leads further than the structural schema which Lévi-Strauss devises. "The Judgment" does not function by simply embodying a contradiction to the audience but by demonstrating the unavoidable contradiction and the pain and tragedy which accompany it. For the popularity of "The Judgment" is based upon the reader's sense that the final suicide is neither arbitrary nor unnecessary. The fascination of the story derives from the unexplainable intuition that the suicide is a logical consequence of what has gone before. But if the necessity of sacrifice expressed in the story is the key to its popularity, the context implied by the story is a traditionalist one. The inescapability of contradiction implies the necessity of sacrifice, and the structural contradiction becomes the substance of a mythic and anti-modern content.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Mark. *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Hasburg Fin de Siècle*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Approaches to Teaching Kafka's Short Fiction*. Ed. Richard T. Gray. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1995.
- Beck, Evelyn Torton. *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater: Its Impact on his Work*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971.
- Beicken, Peter U. "'The Judgment' in the Critics' Judgment." In *The Problem of "The Judgment": Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. 238–251.
- Bernheimer, Charles. "Letters to an Absent Friend: A Structural Reading." In *The Problem of "The Judgment": Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. 146–167.

- Boa, Elizabeth. *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Corngold, Stanley. *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Ellis, John M. "The Bizarre Texture of 'The Judgment.'" In *The Problem of "The Judgment": Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. 73–96.
- Flores, Kate. "The Judgment." 1947. In *Franz Kafka Today*. Ed. Angel Flores and Homer Swander. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964. 5–24.
- Flores, Kate. "The Pathos of Fatherhood." In *The Kafka Debate: New Perspectives For Our Time*. Ed. Angel Flores. New York: Gordian Press, 1977. 254–272.
- Gilman, Sander L. *Franz Kafka, the Jewish Patient*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- Gray, Richard T. *Stations of the Divided Subject: Contestation and Ideological Legitimation in German Bourgeois Literature, 1770–1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Gray, Ronald. "Through Dream to Self-Awareness." In *The Problem of "The Judgment": Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. 63–72.
- Horkheimer, Max. "Authority and the Family." In *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. New York: Continuum, 1989. 47–128.
- Hughes, Kenneth. "A Psychoanalytic Approach to 'The Judgment.'" In *Approaches to Teaching Kafka's Short Fiction*. 84–93.
- Kafka, Franz. *Brief an den Vater. Faksimile*. Ed. Joachim Unsel. Frankfurt: Fischer, 1994.
- Kafka, Franz. *Briefe an Felice und andere Korrespondenz aus der Verlobungszeit*. Ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born. New York: Fischer, Schocken, 1967.
- Kafka, Franz. *Tagebücher 1910–1923*. Ed. Max Brod. New York: Schocken; Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1973.
- Kafka, Franz. "Das Urteil." In *Sämtliche Erzählungen*. Ed. Paul Raabe. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1970. 23–32.
- Kirk, G. S. "On Defining Myths." In *Sacred Narrative*. Ed. Alan Dundes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books, 1963.
- Luhmann, Niklas. *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*. Trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Magny, Claude-Edmonde. "The Objective Depiction of Absurdity." In *The Kafka Problem*. Ed. Angel Flores. New York: New Directions, 1946. Reprint Octagon Books, 1963. 75–96.
- Mitterauer, Michael and Reinhard Sieder. *The European Family: Patriarchy to Partnership from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Trans. Karla Oosterveen and Manfred Hörzinger. 1977. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Neumann, Gerhard. *Franz Kafka, "Das Urteil": Text, Materialien, Kommentar*. Munich: Hanser, 1981.
- Politzer, Heinz. *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962.

- The Problem of "The Judgment": Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. Ed. Angel Flores. New York: Gordian Press, 1977.
- Rolleston, James. "Strategy and Language: Georg Bendemann's Theater of the Self." In *The Problem of the Judgment: Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. 133–145.
- Shorter, Edward. *The Making of the Modern Family*. New York: Basic Books, 1975.
- Sokel, Walter H. *Franz Kafka—Tragik und Ironie: Zur Struktur seiner Kunst*. Munich and Vienna: Albert Langen Georg Mueller Verlag, 1964.
- Sokel, Walter H. "Perspectives and Truth in 'The Judgment.'" In *The Problem of the Judgment: Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. 193–237.
- Speirs, Ronald. "'Das Urteil' oder die Macht der Schwäche." In *Text und Kritik: Sonderband Franz Kafka VII* (1994): 93–108.
- Stern, J. P. "Guilt and the Feeling of Guilt." In *The Problem of the Judgment: Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. 114–131.
- Trahan, Elizabeth W. "Georg Bendemann's Path to the Judgment." In *Approaches to Teaching Kafka's Short Fiction*. 94–104.
- Wagnerová, Alena. *"Im Hauptquartier des Lärms": Die Familie Kafka aus Prag*. Berlin: Bollmann, 1997.
- White, John J. "Georg Bendemann's Friend in Russia: Symbolic Correspondences." In *The Problem of the Judgment: Eleven Approaches to Kafka's Story*. 97–113.

NOTES

1. I use the term "affinity" in the sense of "elective affinities" in which relationships are defined by common interests, not in the anthropological sense which defines kinship and affinity as synonymous.
2. In a more recent interpretation, Trahan echoes Neumann in noting: "The only way to deal with such a father would be to rebel, but from strength rather than from repression of guilt feelings (Georg's marriage might have become such a liberation) or to flee as far away as possible, to the friend in Russia" (102).
3. Ronald Gray demonstrates this point when, after himself arguing for an interpretation of the friend as the writing self, concludes: "The quantity of biographical information needed for understanding the story suggests that it is essentially esoteric, that it has value for its position in Kafka's work, as a gateway, rather than as an accomplished achievement in itself" (72). In order to create his interpretation, Gray must discard the story.
4. As Sokel shows, this opposition between bachelor and engaged man is a dominant theme in Kafka's literary efforts up to the writing of "The Judgment," evident in his "Beschreibung eines Kampfes" and a July 19, 1910, fragment from his diaries (Sokel, "Perspectives" 193).
5. In Sokel's view, Kafka's "Letter to His Father" parallels "The Judgment" in demonstrating the tyranny of the father and the consequent "crippling" of the son. "The origin of discord in 'The Judgment' offers a significant parallel to Kafka's 'Letter' to his father. The letter is an indictment of the father's stifling and crippling influence on the son's natural need for independence and ego-development" (Sokel, "Perspectives" 198). Critics have used this interpretation of the letter in order to support a similar interpretation of the "Judgment" as a story about

patriarchal tyranny. But Kafka did not write the letter nor "The Judgment" simply as attacks on his father. Both "The Judgment" and the "Letter to His Father" are structured as struggles between conflicting perspectives in which the conflict between the perspectives of father and son form part of a fundamental contradiction between the principles of kinship and affinity. Kafka outlines this opposition between father and friends in a passage in the letter where he takes the perspective of his father in describing himself: "Du kennst 'die Dankbarkeit der Kinder,' aber doch wenigstens irgendein Entgegenkommen, Zeichen eines Mitgeföhls; statt dessen habe ich mich seit jeher vor Dir verkrochen, in mein Zimmer, zu Büchern, zu verrückten Freunden, zu überspannten Ideen ... Ottlá habe ich in ihrem Eigensinn unterstützt und während ich für Dich keinen Finger rühre (nicht einmal eine Teaterkarte bringe ich Dir) tue ich für Fremde alles" (*Brief an den Vater* 115–6). But even if the "Letter to His Father" is read as the son's judgment of the father, this does not apply to "The Judgment" in which the father clearly judges the son.

6. Using Lacanian psychoanalysis, Charles Bernheimer has described the narcissism of Georg's relation to his friend in terms of family dynamics and comes to the conclusion that the friend does not really exist except as a narcissistic reflection of Georg's image of himself (147–149). Yet, this interpretation of the friendship as a part of Georg's relation to his parents, in failing to consider the friendship on its own terms, does not explain the process by which Georg's life begins to deviate from that of his friend, nor does it begin to uncover the conflict between affinity and kinship which dominates the story. In Kenneth Hughes's psychoanalytic reading, the figure of the friend is not even addressed. Instead, he describes the key constellation in the story as "father, child, and mother" (90).
7. The choice of presenting the friend as absent is especially significant given the fact that in Kafka's earlier version of the story, "Die städtische Welt" (Kafka, *Tagebücher* 31–35), the friend is present as a strong counterweight to the power of the father in the story, providing, as Rolleston points out (141), a haven to which the main character can escape after fighting with the father.
8. Because he only considers Georg's perspective as a valid one in the story, Neumann reads the engagement exclusively as an "Austritt aus der Familie in die soziale Öffentlichkeit" (119). He designates as regression the possibility that the engagement might also present a return to the familial situation and kinship dynamics (124).
9. As Ellis notes, "It could well be that for Georg constantly to tell himself that his friend is unhappy is essential to his own well-being. There is, after all, something destructive in Georg's 'considerateness' towards his friend. It seems to provide the opportunity for an orgy of denigration of him" (79). With regard to the father, Ellis writes that "the outline of the situation is by now familiar; Georg's success and someone else's failure, with the suggestion that both are brought about by Georg's subtle undermining of the other" (87).
10. By reading the confrontation between father and son purely as a power struggle, Neumann once again depicts Georg's perspective as if it were the only valid one in the story (115–117).
11. Ronald Speirs places the emphasis on the unmarried status of both friend and father: "Der Vater wird bald mit Recht sagen, er sei der 'Vertreter' des Freundes hier am Ort, denn beide verkörpern die gleiche, furchtbare Stasis des Lebens, die gleiche Einsamkeit vor und nach der Ehe" (102). But as is clear from the father's

- accusations, the issue is not their bachelorhood as much as their common betrayal by Georg.
12. Sokel writes: "The reader's inability to make a clear-cut decision for the friend or the father as the exclusive object of the sentence is in itself significant. The ambiguity of the text makes the partners in the 'alliance' against Georg literally indistinguishable' ('Perspectives' 205). But whereas Sokel goes on to conclude that friend and father are two embodiments of the same perspective in the story, in fact the merging of friend and father in Georg's mind at this point only indicates their identity in terms of betrayal by Georg.
 13. According to Lévi-Strauss, because the coyote stands half-way between carnivores and herbivores, this intermediary figure allows a conceptual bridging of a gap which would otherwise be irreconcilable. The original irresolvable contradiction between life and death is replaced by the contradiction between herbivores and predators, this opposition being mediated through the figure of the coyote, which is a carrion-eater (224–225).