

FRANZ KAFKA'S AMERIKA AND ROBERT WALSER'S JAKOB VON GUNTEN

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Norbert J. Collins

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

Department of German,
McGill University
Montreal, Canada.

March, 1976

RÉSUMÉ

Norbert J. Collins

"Franz Kafka's Amerika and Robert Walser's Jakob von Gunten: A Comparative Analysis"

Department of German

Master of Arts

Le but de cette thèse est de clarifier l'affinité littéraire souvent présumée entre Franz Kafka et Robert Walser. Les relations n'ont été décrites jusqu'à présent qu'en termes généraux. Mon essai est basé principalement sur l'analyse comparative d'un roman de chaque auteur (Amerika et Jakob von Gunten). Chaque roman et l'appréciation critique regardant chaque auteur sont analysés en profondeur dans les chapitres séparés, après quoi une conclusion finale originale est tentée.

Quatre questions fondamentales qui s'entrecroisent déterminent la structure de ce travail. Elles se rapportent à: 1) la structure et les méthodes narratives, 2) la lutte des héros et le problème allié de la conscience, 3) le lien entre le héros et la société, et 4) le langage.

Les conclusions révèlent une affinité entre les deux écrivains plus complexe qu'elle n'avait été estimée plus tôt. Jakob von Gunten contient un caractère subjectif inexistant dans l'oeuvre de Kafka; l'enchaînement de la narration, la conception de la lutte des héros en relation avec la société, et l'usage de la langue et de l'ironie par les deux auteurs tendent à être reliés.

C O N T E N T S

Introduction	Page 1
Notes	6
I. The Problem of Consciousness in Kafka's "Beschreibung eines Kampfes"	8
1. Narrator and Acquaintance	8
2. The Predicament of the "I"	13
Notes	18
II. <u>Amerika (Der Verschollene)</u>	20
1. Consciousness and Reality	21
2. The Struggle of the Hero	28
3. The Socially-Critical Tendencies	37
4. Ambiguity and Language	44
5. The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma	48
Notes	52
III. <u>Jakob von Gunten</u>	55
1. The Perspective of the Narrator	55
2. Jakob's Struggle	60
3. Jakob's Renunciation of Society	67
4. Jakob's Diary	72
5. The Final Dream and Jakob's Departure	77
Notes	80
IV. <u>Amerika and Jakob von Gunten (with Notes concerning "Beschreibung eines Kampfes")</u>	82
1. Narration	82
2. The Heroes' Struggles/ The Problem of Consciousness	86

3. The Individual and Society	90
4. The Problem of Language	92
5. Conclusion	94
Notes	97

A Selected Bibliography	98
1. Primary Sources	98
2. Secondary Sources	98

Introduction

The possibility of a close literary relationship between the Swiss author Robert Walser and the lawyer-writer of Prague Franz Kafka has been widely noted. Max Brod, a friend of Kafka's, testifies to Kafka's partiality for Walser and himself points out linguistic similarities in Kafka's "Auf der Galerie" and Walser's "Gebirgshallen".¹ Robert Musil detected parallels in Kafka's and Walser's early published material. He wrote a review in 1914 for Die Neue Rundschau, critically appraising Kafka's Betrachtung as an imitation of Walser's work: "[Betrachtung wirkt] wie ein Spezialfall des Typus Walser."² Fritz Martini observes in his history of German literature: "Er wurde ein bevorzugter Autor F. Kafkas, und er hat ihm manches mitgegeben."³ Klaus Wagenbach counts Walser, along with Heinrich von Kleist, as the most important literary influence on Kafka in his Kafka biography.⁴ Wilhelm Emrich hints at a Walser influence in his Kafka-book:

Ferner beschäftigte er [Kafka] sich mit Marc Aurel, Meister Eckhart und den Dichtungen Hamsuns, Hofmannsthals, Thomas Manns, Flauberts [. . .] und--etwa seit 1909--mit Robert Walser, vor allem mit Walsers Jakob von Gunten.⁵

Herbert and Elisabeth Frenzel note, following a lead from Walter Höllerer's statements in the afterword of a Walser text Prosa:

Das Leben im Institut Benjamenta [Jakob von Gunten] als Gleichnis der Situation des Menschen. In den Motiven und der zur Chiffre tendierenden Sprache war Walser Vorläufer Kafkas, der Walsers 'Konzept [. . .] weiterdachte und weiterdrehte'. (Walter Höllerer)⁶

Klaus Günther Just writes in a literary history:

[. . .] bei Walser ist die beschworene Welt eine im vorab immer auch schon versunkene Welt. Das weist über Huch hinaus und erinnert als auktoriales Verfahren an Kafka.⁷

H. M. Waidson writes in a critical review:

Light, lyrical and witty, with an easy, gentle irony, Walser's style has affinities with that of the early stories of Hesse or of Kafka's collected works.⁸

Bernard Rang similarly refers to Jakob von Gunten as a "[. . .] cheerfully serious work of an almost Mozartian tenor, of which (for good reasons) Kafka thought very highly."⁹ George Avery states in a study of Walser's novels and short prose:

A comparative textual study of themes, style, forms, and imagery in Kafka and Walser would, I believe, not only reveal a significant area of correspondence in their work, but would place Kafka's achievement in more intimate relation to the themes prevalent in the first decade of the century than has so far been the case in studies of his work.¹⁰

The first in-depth comparative studies of Kafka and Walser were published in 1966, corresponding to the appearance of a new edition of Walser's collected works.¹¹ These essays tend to both confirm and question connections between Kafka and Walser.

The problem of the isolated "I" and its broken relationship to the world, as it appears in some early stories and in the novels Jakob von Gunten and Das Schloß, is discussed by Wolf Wondratscheck in "Weder Schrei noch Lächeln: Robert Walser und Franz Kafka".¹² Wondratscheck also suggests a correspondence in certain structural elements. The "irreal" universal, he argues, constantly becomes apparent as a sphere found in and around the immediate sensual reality:

Bei Walser wie bei Kafka wird realistisch erzählt, doch so, daß die gesamte Choreographie tieferer Sinnbezüglichkeit deutlich wird. Mit gelassener Selbstverständlichkeit wird die Fiktion der Realität überantwortet. [. . .] Universelles, Allgemeines wird inmitten purer Alltäglichkeit offenbar.¹³

Christof Schmid, on the other hand, claims to make a basic stylistic distinction between Kafka's and Walser's prose in his essay "Robert Walsers 'Geschwätzigkeit'".¹⁴ He attributes much of Walser's ambiguity to an infatuation with language as an actual purpose and end in itself:

Nicht eine ausserhalb der Verbalisation existierende Wahrheit oder Wirklichkeit wäre mit ihrer Hilfe zu fassen, sondern sie selbst wäre die Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit, um die es geht.¹⁵

Schmid contrasts what he considers to be Walser's subjective and often themeless style with Kafka's search for an "absolute" with the help of language:

Für ihn [Kafka] ist die Sprache in ihrer wesentlichsten und allgemeinsten Beschaffenheit Medium: Medium der Selbstklärung und der Mitteilung. [. . .] 'Zwischen der subjektiven Ich-Welt und der objektiven Aussenwelt ...' hat sie zu vermitteln.¹⁶

The similarities between Walser's puzzling "Institut Benjamenta" and

Kafka's mysterious town-castle complex (Das Schloß) are mentioned by Jochen Greven in his essay "Wiederkehr eines Verschollenen: Robert Walser".¹⁷ Just as Schmid, Greven avoids overemphasizing the importance of any external similarities:

Sicher ist [. . .], daß Kafka sich in Walsers Ichverkleidungen auch selbst wiederzuerkennen vermochte, und zwar so sehr, daß daraus Kritik entsprang. [. . .] Kafka wendet sich hier skeptisch gegen einen exzentrischen Subjektivismus, den er offenbar als seine eigene so gut wie als Walsers Gefahr ansah.¹⁸

Karl Pestalozzi also hesitates to concede more than a certain superficial resemblance, as he argues in his study "Nachprüfung einer Vorliebe: Franz Kafkas Beziehung zum Werk Robert Walsers".¹⁹ Though both writers would have concerned themselves with the problems of the individual in the modern world and confronted them with art, Kafka would have rejected Walser's often gay and unruffled outlook. Pestalozzi points out that Walser's heroes often find a refuge in nature, dreams or "disappearing", while Kafka's fight serious and consequential existential battles. Otto Best, however, points out a dualistic Jakob-Kraus conflict in Jakob von Gunten and compares it to K.'s struggle with the castle servants and officials in Das Schloß. Best's essay "Zwei Mal Schule der Körperbeherrschung und drei Schriftsteller"²⁰ illustrates a common juxtaposition of affirmation of individuality (and confrontation in a manifold world) with unreflecting surrender to a determinant law or order in the two novels. Servants, for example, completely subject to the castle laws and servants, as agents for the ideals of the Benjamenta Institute, argues Best, represent the same transcendental sphere. They would attempt to "lure" the respective central figure into the service of Klamm (Das Schloß) or into Kraus' "kindlich-glückliche Daseinsform".²¹

Considering the critical literature referred to above, the Kafka-Walser question is far from settled. The mentioned essays, whose statements often conflict, deal briefly and vaguely with certain isolated problems without offering comprehensive conclusive analysis. In this thesis I wish to draw a more complete picture delineating the hitherto undefined border-areas which link and distinguish the two authors and concentrating on the fundamental points numbered below.

Christof Schmid, not unlike Karl Pestalozzi and Jochen Greven, considers Walser's highly personal and "geschwätzige" narrative style to be the decisive factor distinguishing his work from Kafka's.

Die Sprache selbst wäre Zweck des Schreibens. Das hätte erhebliche Konsequenzen für die Schreibhaltung und für den gesamten Werkstil. Nichts Inhaltliches wäre mehr beabsichtigt. [. . .] Der Abstand zwischen Walsers und Kafkas Werk wird in diesem unterschiedlichen Sprachverständnis von seinen unterschiedlichen künstlerischen Prämissen her verständlich, von denen aus ein Vergleich eher als Abgrenzung denn als Annäherung sinnvoll ist [. . .].²²

(1) Do the methods of narration really form "opposites", which effectively obscure all other stylistic and thematic similarities?

Pestalozzi and Best maintain conflicting viewpoints concerning the "struggles" of Kafka's and Walser's heroes. The "breakdown of consciousness"²³ is a specially determinant and central problem in Kafka's and Walser's books. (2) What factors determine the heroes' crises and what is the nature of their struggles?

As Wondratscheck and Pestalozzi have pointed out, the theme of the "isolated individual" is predominant in each author's work. (3) Exactly how related are Kafka's and Walser's socially-critical positions?

Neither Kafka nor Walser has been successfully classified an expressionist, surrealist, naturalist, impressionist or symbolist writer. The two contemporaries developed unique stylistic techniques, which are related and yet obviously different, describing what they considered to be an extremely complicated and opaque world with language and imagery that seem to have lost all conventional descriptive capacity. Wondratscheck is quoted above:

Bei Walser wie bei Kafka wird realistisch erzählt, doch so, daß die gesamte Choreographie tieferer Sinnbezüglichkeit deutlich wird. [. . .]

(4) How is it possible to narrate "realistisch" and at the same time let "die gesamte Choreographie tieferer Sinnbezüglichkeit" appear?

In order to answer these necessarily general, overlapping questions and still to retain preciseness, the surveyed material must be limited. The

study is based on the novels Amerika (Der Verschollene, 1913-14) and Jakob von Gunten (1908). In a letter to Director Eisner (1909), Kafka confirms his familiarity with Jakob von Gunten:

[. . .] Walser kennt mich? Ich kenne ihn nicht, Jakob von Gunten kenne ich, ein gutes Buch. Die anderen Bücher habe ich nicht gelesen [. . .] .²⁴

The novels' theme is the conflict between the demands of day-to-day survival and aesthetical-spiritual needs. The central figures, like many protagonists of the epoch, sense the foundations of their existence outside of normal consciousness and experience. What is common to both novels is the authors' rejection of realistic-psychological cognition and narration. The books denote distinct turning-points in the literary development of each author and, as early works, represent (in this case) the period of greatest convergence.

Before turning to the novels themselves, however, I want to point out, in the following chapter, some aspects of Kafka's first story "Beschreibung eines Kampfes" (first version 1904-05; second version 1907-08). In this unusual work Kafka is developing certain narrative structures that will be of interest later in our study, as well as defining some basic themes that occur in both of the novels under discussion. I am devoting separate chapters to each novel (Chapters II and III) before offering comparative results (Chapter IV); in this way I hope to: 1) grant each work its specific and individual characteristics, i.e. avoid the temptation of "distilling" similarities and differences, and 2) to consider as much critical opinion as possible (a requirement which the previous comparative efforts certainly have not met).

Notes

1. Max Brod, Streitbares Leben (Munich: Kindler Verlag, 1960), p. 393.
2. Robert Musil, review of Betrachtung, by Franz Kafka (Leipzig: Ernst Rowohlt, 1913), Die Neue Rundschau, 2, (1914), p. 1169.
3. Fritz Martini, Deutsche Literaturgeschichte, Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1968), p. 618.
4. Klaus Wagenbach, Franz Kafka, Eine Biographie seiner Jugend 1883-1912 (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1958), p. 159.
5. Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka (Frankfurt a. M. and Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1970), p. 412.
6. Herbert and Elisabeth Frenzel, Daten deutscher Dichtung (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1953), p. 516.
7. Klaus Günther Just, Von der Gründerzeit bis zur Gegenwart, Volume IV (Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1973), p. 198.
8. H. M. Waidson, as quoted in: Modern German Literature, A Library of Literary Criticism, Volume II, compiled and edited by Agnes Domandi (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), p. 331.
9. Ibid, p. 330.
10. George Avery, Inquiry and Testament (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), p. 263.
11. Robert Walser, Das Gesamtwerk, edited by Jochen Greven (Genf and Hamburg: H. Kossodo Verlag, 1966ff.).
12. Wolf Wondratschek, "Weder Schrei noch Lächeln", Text und Kritik, 12 (1966), pp. 17-21.
13. Ibid, p. 18.
14. Christof Schmid, "Robert Walsers 'Geschwätzigkeit'", Schweizer Monatshefte, 52 (1972), pp. 199-204.
15. Ibid, p. 200.
16. Ibid, p. 203.
17. Jochen Greven, "Wiederkehr eines Verschollenen: Robert Walser", Literatur und Kritik, 9/10 (1966), pp. 72-75.
18. Ibid, pp. 72-73.
19. Karl Pestalozzi, "Nachprüfung einer Vorliebe: Franz Kafkas Beziehung zum Werk Robert Walsers", Akzente (1966), pp. 322-344.
20. Otto Best, "Zwei Mal Schule der Körperbeherrschung und drei Schriftsteller", Modern Language Notes, 85 (1970), pp. 727-741.
21. Ibid, p. 739.
22. Christof Schmid, pp. 201-203.
23. I will use the definitions of consciousness found in:

Wilhelm Hehlmann, Wörterbuch der Psychologie (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1965), pp. 60-61.

Heinrich Schmidt and Georgi Schischkoff, Philosophisches Wörterbuch (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1965), p. 61.

24. Franz Kafka, Briefe, edited by Max Brod (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1958), p. 76.

I. The Problem of Consciousness in Kafka's "Beschreibung eines Kampfes"¹

In this early work Kafka deals with the reliability of thought. He examines basic relationships between various forms of consciousness and reality. The predicament of Kafka's narrator, the "I" of the story, is expressed with the following parable:

'Was sollen unsere Lungen tun', schrie ich, schrie, 'atmen sie rasch, ersticken sie an sich, an innern Giften; atmen sie langsam, ersticken sie an nicht atembarer Luft, an den empörten Dingen. Wenn sie aber ihr Tempo suchen wollen, gehen sie schon am Suchen zugrunde.' [I, 126]

The "I", by attempting expansion of perception and consciousness--metaphorically the "quicker breathing"--soon reaches the limitations of the organ itself, its "inner poisons". Overtaxing the finite mind he experiences a sense of imbalance. By sustaining normal categorical delineations of thought ("slow breathing"), he falsifies his perception of reality, producing the "unbreathable air" and the choking sensation. The compromising possibility of self-regulation--reliance on emotion and intuition--leads to the endless cycle of reflection and counter reflection, like holding two mirrors face-to-face. Yet the lung is a vital organ, whose activities may never be halted, which may be influenced within a certain radius, but never really controlled. Breathing is a basically automatic and, in this sense, an irrational necessity. The paradox Kafka herewith formulated dominates the entire story. Perhaps most striking is the implied sense of loss and the criticism of traditional empirical associations. The urgency of the narrator's situation is indicated with the double usage of the verb "schrie". And the action connoted by this word is problematic, since yelling requires the use of the lungs in a function not really classified as "breathing".

I.1. Narrator and Acquaintance

At the story's commencement, the narrator and his acquaintance ("der Bekannte") are at some sort of party or tavern--no particulars are offered. The acquaintance is preoccupied with maintaining social contact, his most apparent characteristic being to reaffirm his own existence by cultivating relationships with others. This need is expressed by his attraction to women.

'[. . .] ich bin bis jetzt mit meinem Mädchen allein in einem Neben-

-zimmer gesessen. Von halb elf an. Sie Mensch, das war einmal ein Abend. [. . .] Aber Sie müssen mir--ich bitte--verzeihen, das Glück hält es einfach nicht in mir aus [. . .] . Noch vor einem Weilchen dort in dem Zimmer waren wir allein, das Annerl mit mir. Und ich habe sie geküsst--habe--ich--sie auf ihren Mund, ihre Ohren, ihre Schultern. Mein Gott und Herr!' [II, 11-13]

The narrator, however, is sitting alone. He avoids any organization of his thoughts, his attention being attracted by various unrelated objects.

Ich sass an einem kleinen Tischchen--es hatte drei gespannte dünne Beine--nippte gerade an dem dritten Gläschen Benediktiner und über-sah im Trinken zugleich meinen kleinen Vorrat von Backwerk, das ich selbst ausgesucht und aufgeschichtet hatte. [II, 11]

Uncomfortable in the confined, sociable atmosphere of the evening gathering, he lures his acquaintance outside into the night. The fragmented description is succeeded by reflective thought outside on the streets. Every statement dealing with conventional awareness and lifestyle is formulated ironically:

Kaum waren wir ins Freie getreten, als ich offenbar in bedeutende Munterkeit geriet. [II, 15; my underlinings]

Den Tag über im Amt, abends in Gesellschaft, in der Nacht auf den Gassen und nichts übers Mass. Eine in ihrer Natürlichkeit schon grenzenlose Lebensweise! [II, 17]

The narrator seems to be deeply shaken by the capriciousness of his thinking and its questionable relationship to existential functions.

Ich achtete darauf, wie unsere Schritte klangen und konnte nicht begreifen, dass es mir unmöglich war, mit meinem Bekannten im gleichen Schritt zu bleiben. Dabei war klare Luft, ich konnte seine Beine deutlich sehen. Hie und da lehnte auch jemand in einem Fenster und betrachtete uns. [II, 17]

The narrator mistrusts the validity of any intercourse between subject and object; he represents the negation of every unreflected conclusion and finite act of the acquaintance. Yet the narrator also seems to need his companion and is attracted by the sense of being at home in the world. Thus he thinks:

Wer weiss, dieser Mensch, der jetzt neben mir mit in der Kälte rauchendem Mund an Stubenmädchensachen dachte, war vielleicht imstande, mir vor den Leuten Wert zu geben, ohne dass ich ihn erst erwerben musste. [II, 21]

But immediately following this statement (characterized by the narrator's typical "vielleicht"), he senses danger in emotional infatuation and clings

to the notion of an intensified consciousness:

Wenn sie [girls] ihn küssen, küssen sie mich ja auch ein wenig, wenn man will; mit dem Mundwinkel gewissermassen; wenn sie ihn aber entführen, dann stehlen sie mir ihn. Und er soll immer bei mir bleiben, immer, wer soll ihn beschützen wenn nicht ich. [II, 23]

Yet now his reasoning comes full circle. At first reassured by the unknowable, self-perpetuating functions of being, but then apprehensive that his precious "I" could be endangered, he finally realizes his dependency on the acquaintance:

Er ist ja so dumm. Im Februar sagt man ihm: Du komm auf den Laurenziberg, und er läuft mit. Und wie wenn er jetzt fällt, wie, wenn er sich verkühlt, wie, wenn ein Eifersüchtiger aus der Postgasse heraus ihn überfällt? Was soll dann mit mir geschehn, soll ich dann aus der Welt herausgeworfen werden? [II, 23]

These statements would substantiate Walter Sokel's theory that the "characters" under discussion are actually two modes of the same entity.² On the one hand is the "ich", the first person narrator, the consciousness. "He" remains between affirmation and denial of given variables by avoiding every sensual-empirical conclusion and refusing to apply delimiting intellectual categories. His irony corresponds with the urge to transcend his own limitations by adopting a negative (free) position to routine values and behaviour. On the other side is the "du", representing the personified self and ironically termed the "acquaintance", since the narrator is largely unfamiliar with him, his own sentient being. The acquaintance is pure being and, as such, embodies the self-evident avowal of circumstances. Suggesting the ambivalence of consciousness, Kafka describes the fluctuations (i.e. struggle) of personal identity between self (acquaintance) and consciousness of self (narrator).

On page 19, for instance, the narrator expresses the wish to leave the acquaintance, yet reports a few pages later:

Als ich noch rasch nach einem Mittel suchte, um wenigstens ein Weilchen bei meinem Bekannten bleiben zu dürfen [. . .] . [II, 27; my underlining]

Consciousness is an inherently fluctuating process. Its content--opinions, intentions, desires, etc.--representing the "I" at any given time, can vary

from moment to moment.³ The word ambivalence is appropriate in describing the narrator's attitudes. His "struggle" simply runs its course between the poles of intensified consciousness/ "inner poisons" and limited individuality/ "unbreathable air".

The apparently condoned blurring of conscious borderlines between emotions and ideas, inner and outer, reality and fantasy, which is heightened as the story progresses, is accompanied by a widened split between narrator and acquaintance. Random associations, not the harmonious interplay between intellect and desires, begin to mark the narrator's conscious processes. After having gone outside away from the social gathering, the narrator literally finds himself on "icy" ground, but also acquires some measure of independence. His quest for autonomy ends with a quest for "complete" consciousness. Breaking away down a side "alley", slipping on the ice almost immediately, the narrator thinks:

So kannte ich mit einem Male alle die vielen Sterne bei Namen, trotzdem ich es niemals gelernt hatte. Ja, es waren merkwürdige Namen, schwer zu behalten, aber ich wußte sie alle und sehr genau. [I, 38]

This could be considered "fast breathing". But experiencing the sensation of total consciousness, existence itself becomes impossible: he succumbs to "inner poisons".

Ich kam aber nicht weit mit dem Nennen der Sterne, denn ich mußte weiterschwimmen, wollte ich nicht zusehr untertauchen. [I, 38]

He must keep "swimming" if he wants to live. The image "swimming in air" suggests an intellectual exercise without reliable reference points, which could never be brought under control, and during which a cessation of movement--of struggle--would mean death. The narrator's drive towards heightened consciousness is in the end synonymous with a confrontation with the chaotic "whole", chaotic in view of his finite conceptions.⁴

The concept of "guilt", as various critics have associated it with Kafka, is applicable in this story. Jörg Thalmann describes it as: "[. . .] den ursprünglichen, unaufhebbaren Abstand zur Welt, der den Eindruck hervorruft, man bleibe hinter ihr zurück, könne sie nie erreichen."⁵ Wilhelm Emrich notes: "Die Grenzen unseres Bewußtseins verwandeln jeden Moment unseres Daseins in Schuld."⁶ The narrator, who feels "suffocated" in his li-

-mited conceptions, is attracted by the apparent purity of chaos and equates it with a sense of totality and wholeness, which he misses in his every thought.

'Los mit den Geschichten! Ich will nichts mehr in Brocken hören. Erzählen Sie mir alles, von Anfang bis zu Ende. Weniger höre ich nicht an, das sage ich Ihnen. Aber auf das Ganze brenne ich.' [II, 41]

Because he finds a struggle necessary, the "opening-up" of the narrator's mind can not be understood only psychologically as an essentially negative decomposition of personality.⁷

Nevertheless, man's identity is rooted in order and control, in a sense of self. The cessation of intellectual selection and distinction is necessarily accompanied by paranoiac sensations, here the conviction that he (the narrator) is about to be "murdered" (II, 31). Individual identity is threatened. The narrator is helpless without the acquaintance; the acquaintance is nothing without the narrator. And here lies the central irony of the story: the continuous frivolous bickering is between two "components" of being, which are in fact only distinguished through the limitations of consciousness.

The movement of the narrator's thinking is antithetical, as can best be seen after he "wins" the struggle with the acquaintance (the self-inflicted wound) in the final part of the story. This latter figure is finally deprived of all inherent value, falls into despair--and the "I" responds with a conciliatory, positivistic speech!

'Du bist so schön gestellt, von Freundlichkeiten umgeben, am hellen Tag kannst du spazieren gehn, wenn viele Menschen sorgfältig gekleidet weit und nah zwischen Tischen oder auf Hügelwegen zu sehen sind. Denke nur, im Frühjahr, da werden wir in den Baumgarten fahren, nein nicht wir werden fahren, das ist schon leider wahr aber du mit dem Annerl wirst fahren in Freude und Trab. O ja, glaube mir, ich bitte dich, und die Sonne wird euch schönstens allen Leuten zeigen. Oh, da ist Musik, man hört die Pferde weit, es ist keine Sorge nötig, da ist Geschrei und Leierkästen spielen in den Alleen.' [I, 138]

The monologue actually neither affirms nor negates the sphere of the acquaintance. (No real victory is possible for either side.) The "I" must maintain its negativity or breathe the "unbreathable air" that is the world of the acquaintance. Yet by doing so, he excludes the possibility of over-

-coming his own loneliness. The knife stab (I, 136) suggests that the narrator's self-examination and "struggle" is a perversion, an intrusion on the acquaintance's simple, innocent purity. The safe conception of a self-evident and secure human order, which is expressed in the above quote, can only be understood ironically in respect to the doubt inherent in his own convictions; yet simultaneously the value of the "I", of consciousness, is denied: "nicht wir werden fahren, das ist schon leider wahr, sondern du". Kafka, in the impressionistic motto of the story--

Und die Menschen gehn in Kleidern
schwankend auf dem Kies spazieren
unter diesem großen Himmel,
der von Hügeln in der Ferne
sich zu fernen Hügeln breitet.

--distills the resultant polarization of the human and universal spheres. The normal conceptual world ("Menschen [. . .] in Kleidern") is isolated from immeasurable horizons ("Hügeln in der Ferne"/ "fernen Hügeln") beneath an immense (unknowable?) sky; the mode of existence is "schwankend".⁸

I.2. The Predicament of the Consciousness

The narrator would seem to have no choice other than to approach his problem with reflective thought. It seems, in fact, that the less he understands the reasons for his intellectual doubt, the more he feels compelled to discover those reasons. The more a solid, objective reality becomes a doubted function of his own mind, the more desperate he is to find a core or pivotal identity to fall back on. The fantastic middle part of the story deals nearly exclusively with the immediate situation of the mind. (The acquaintance is forgotten on the "road" at the beginning of the narrator's metaphysical adventures.) The theme--the problem of a state of consciousness which secures a workable conception of neither the self nor reality⁹--is maintained, but varied from the first and last portions of the story. There Kafka described the narrator's impulse towards transcendental freedom, juxtaposing the apparently secure world of "normal" people¹⁰ with the disfigured world of the social outsider; here, in the middle section, he deals directly with the problem of cognition.

The "I", freed from material constrictions, is now able to rearrange his surroundings according to his fancy.

Unbesorgt ging ich weiter. Weil ich aber als Fussgänger die Anstrengung der bergigen Strasse fürchtete, liess ich den Weg immer flacher werden und sich in der Entfernung endlich zu einem Tale senken. Die Steine verschwanden nach meinem Willen und der Wind verlor sich: [. . .] Da ich Fichtenwälder liebe, ging ich durch solche Wälder und da ich gerne stumm zu den Sternen schaue, so gingen mir auf dem Himmel die Sterne langsam auf, wie es ihre Art ist. [II, 47-49]

Yet following this initial euphoria, it again becomes evident that normal conceptions of self are incompatible with a radically expanded consciousness. The narrator's statements indicate the arbitrary character of his intellectual struggle.

Diese so rasch entstandene Weite meiner Aussicht erschreckte mich. Ich dachte nach, warum ich hergekommen war in dieses Land, dessen Wege ich nicht kannte. Es schien mir, als hätte ich im Traume mich her verirrt und begriffe das Schreckliche meiner Lage erst im Erwachen. Da hörte ich zum Glück einen Vogel im Walde und es kam beruhigend über mich, daß ich doch meines Vergnügens halber hergegangen wäre.

'Dein Leben war einförmig' so redete ich laut, um mich davon zu überzeugen 'es war wirklich nötig, daß du anders wohin geführt wurdest. Du kannst zufrieden sein, es ist lustig hier. Die Sonne scheint.'
[I, 54]

A landscape and weather conditions have more weight than his own personality. Although committed to a struggle while in the reassuring presence of the acquaintance, he clings when on unfamiliar ground to safe associations, one after another. The underlying problem is that the narrator projects subjective categories onto his surroundings. The "objective" world retains no substance of its own. As the narrator becomes "tired" (I, 50; II, 51), he wants to confirm his existence from outside, but only perceives a dependent, variable and therefore meaningless¹¹ world.

Ich wollte rasch herunterklettern, aber da der Ast so zitterte wie meine Hand, so fiel ich erstarrt von der Höhe. [. . .] ich fühlte mich so schwach und unglücklich, daß ich das Gesicht in den Waldboden legte, da ich die Anstrengung die Dinge der Erde um mich zu sehn, nicht ertragen konnte. Ich war überzeugt, daß jede Bewegung und jeder Gedanke erzwungen seien, daß man sich daher vor ihnen hüten solle.
[I, 54-56]

Forced to recognize the inconsistency of his perceptions, the subject is isolated from the object, he is (fearfully) made aware of his own loneli-

-ness, and he feels the subsequently "imposing" demands of the "Dinge der Erde". His very movements and thoughts become unreliable and artificial. The narrator's attempt to confirm his identity in the "objective" world fails.

Since consciousness is the medium through which the narrator contemplates, conceives and interprets the world, he must essentially approach his own mind in order to understand his insecurity.¹² He thus meets the fat man ("der Dicke"), Kafka's metaphor for self-reflected consciousness and described as the narrator's own intellect by both Wilhelm Emrich and Walter Sokel, thinking; "[. . .] vielleicht konnte ich etwas erfahren über die Gefährlichkeit dieses scheinbar sicheren Landes." (I, 68) The contrast between the "I" ("wie eine Stange in baumelnder Bewegung" [I, 22; II, 23]) and the fat man is not only based on the principle of antithesis, but is an ambiguous yet vivid description of the narrator's predicament. Consciousness may be an unstable and uncertain phenomenon, but appears heavy and uncontrollably large upon self-reflection, i.e. takes on more importance, becomes self-indulgent and feeds on the rest of the being.

The fat man personifies the narrator's leaning towards a transcendental view: he is not interested in the diversity of the phenomena found in the world.¹³

- 'Die Landschaft stört mich in meinem Denken' sagte er [the fat man] leise 'sie läßt meine Überlegungen schwanken, wie Kettenbrücken bei zorniger Strömung. Sie ist schön und will deshalb betrachtet sein'. [. . .] 'Während du mir [. . .] dieses zeigst, hinterlistiger Berg, verdeckst du mir die Fernsicht, die mich erheitert, denn sie zeigt Erreichbares in schönem Überblick.' [I, 60-62]

Yet by reducing the world to purely conceptual, non-objective and non-limited categories, he himself expands into non-qualitative chaos--a state similar to that of the narrator described above (p. 11).

Der Dicke drehte sich langsam in der Richtung des strömenden Wassers und wurde flussabwärts getragen, wie ein Götterbild aus hellem Holz, das überflüssig geworden war und das man daher in den Fluß geworfen hatte. [I, 66]

The fat man only embodies one aspect of the narrator's intellectual processes. He replies to the narrator's queries with a story about the worshipper ("der Beter"), a story naturally told from the viewpoint of the fat man. These various "functions" of the "I" (acquaintance, fat man, worshipper) are not made completely distinct from each other, rather they are blended, overlapped and alternated. The worshipper, unlike the fat man, desires a bind to the concrete, phenomenal world.

"[. . .] ich sage, daß es der Zweck meines Betens ist von den Leuten angeschaut zu werden." [I, 86]

Just as the fat man can not gain a transcendental view, the worshipper fails to delineate the actual qualities of the "Dinge" with language,^{14 15} and is forced to rely on his own changing conceptions.

"Gott sei Dank, Mond, du bist nicht mehr Mond, aber vielleicht ist es nachlässig von mir, daß ich dich Mondbenannter noch immer Mond nenne. Warum bist du nicht mehr so übermütig, wenn ich dich nenne 'vergessene Papierlaterne in merkwürdiger Farbe'. Und warum ziehst du dich fast zurück, wenn ich dich 'Mariensäule' nenne und ich erkenne deine drohende Haltung nicht mehr Mariensäule, wenn ich dich nenne 'Mond, der gelbes Licht wirft.'" [I, 106]

The fat man, critical of the worshipper although helpless himself, knows that his counterpart forms the external world in a characteristic manner based on the finite system of categories which "stifle" the narrator.¹⁶

'Ja, ich ahne schon, ja ich ahnte es schon, seit ich euch zum erstenmal sah, in welchem Zustande ihr seid. Ich habe Erfahrung und es ist nicht scherzend gemeint, wenn ich sage, daß es eine Seekrankheit auf festem Lande ist. Deren Wesen ist so, daß ihr den wahrhaftigen Namen der Dinge vergessen habt und über sie jetzt in einer Eile zufällige Namen schüttet.' [I, 88]

As the worshipper naively points out to the fat man, using almost the same formulation used earlier by the narrator (see p. 14 above), he experiences the social detachment and related uncertainty which typifies the narrator's existence:

[Version I:] "'Es hat niemals eine Zeit gegeben, in der ich durch mich selbst von meinem Leben überzeugt war. Ich erfasse nämlich die Dinge um mich nur in so hinfälligen Vorstellungen, daß ich immer glaube, die Dinge hätten einmal gelebt, jetzt ~~aber~~ seien sie versinkend. Immer, lieber Herr, habe ich eine so quälende Lust, die Dinge so zu sehn, wie sie sich geben mögen, ehe sie sich mir zeigen. Sie sind da wohl schön und ruhig. Es muß so sein, denn ich höre oft Leute in dieser Weise von ihnen reden.'" [90]

[Version II:] "'Und ich hoffe von Ihnen zu erfahren, wie es sich mit den Dingen eigentlich verhält, die um mich wie ein Schneefall ver-

-sinkend, während vor andern schon ein kleines Schnapsglas auf dem Tisch fest wie ein Denkmal steht.'" [91]

Together the fat man and the worshipper enact what Kafka ironically titles the "Beweis dessen, daß es unmöglich ist zu leben" (I, 44).

I have till now ignored the problem of the two versions because the second version is largely incomplete, Kafka having apparently revised only portions of the original. In those passages where two versions are at hand, it is possible to note the omission of explicit and pragmatic references to the problem of knowledge.¹⁷ In the passage quoted directly above, for example, the reference to the "Dinge" is shorter and vaguer in the final version, just as the normal conceptions of the "Leute" (simply the "andern" in the rewrite) are made increasingly enigmatic through the employment of a comparison ("ein kleines Schnapsglas auf dem Tisch fest wie ein Denkmal steht").

To conclude: natural cognitive functions--as thinking itself--are denied the illusion of veracity for the "I" of the story. Why does he experience these sensations of mental doubt, not just alienated from an ineffable reality, but from himself as well? Peter Heller has perhaps formulated an appropriate reply: "What happens when traditions, institutions, beliefs, modes of thought and feeling become subject to rapid disintegration?"¹⁸ "Beschreibung eines Kampfes" does not, however, pursue the social themes found in Amerika and Jakob von Gunten, although the isolation of the narrator/ worshipper is a central problem. As Karl Horst would show, the problem of "lost cultural viability"--the parallel to the shown "disintegration of harmony between subject and object" (and to self-alienation)--is a general one, characteristic of the epoch.¹⁹ For our comparison of Kafka and Walser this story is vital because it specifically associates the split between "I" and "world" with problems of perception and the crisis of individuality, employing narrative irony and antithesis for the purpose of describing the "simultaneity of perception".²⁰

Notes

1. Quotes are from the critical edition: Beschreibung eines Kampfes: die zwei Fassungen, edited by Max Brod and Ludwig Dietz (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 1969). All references are indicated in brackets, e.g., page 51 of version two = (II, 51).
2. Walter Sokel, Franz Kafka, Tragik und Ironie (Munich and Vienna: Langen & Müller Verlag, 1964), p. 37.
3. See Wilhelm Hehlmann, Wörterbuch der Psychologie, p. 60: "Bewußtsein ist ein selber zeitlich abfließendes Geschehen [. . .] ."
4. Compare Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka, p. 41. See also Wilhelm Hehlmann, p. 60: "[. . .] die Anzahl der gleichzeitig deutlich erlebbaren Bewußtseinsinhalte ist begrenzt [. . .] . Bewegungsvollzüge können durch das Bewußtsein bewirkt, gelenkt und unterstützt, aber auch gestört werden."
5. Jörg Thalmann, Wege zu Kafka, Eine Interpretation des Amerikaromans (Frauenfeld and Stuttgart: Huber Verlag, 1966), p. 115.
6. Wilhelm Emrich, p. 54.
7. James Rolleston points out the "essential disorderliness of the relation between subject and object", illustrating the unpredictable stability of perception and self, but hesitating to attribute any purpose or constancy to the narrator's position. Kafka's Narrative Theater (University Park: The Penn. State Univ. Press, 1974), p. 7.
8. See Christoph Bezzel, Natur bei Kafka, Studien zur Ästhetik des poetischen Zeichens (Nürnberg: Verlag Hans Carl, 1964), pp. 7-8.
9. See Judith Ryan, "Die zwei Fassungen der 'Beschreibung eines Kampfes'", Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft, 14 (1970), p. 556.
10. Ibid, p. 565.
11. Compare Wilhelm Emrich, p. 88: "Gerade in dieser selbstgeschaffenen Landschaft aber fühlt sich der Mensch völlig einsam in einer sinnentleerten Welt."
12. See Wilhelm Hehlmann, pp. 60-61: "[. . .] das Bewußtsein [. . .] umfaßt den unmittelbar vorfindlichen Gesamtinhalt der Wahrnehmungs- und Phantasietätigkeit einschließlich der Strébungen, Gefühle, Affekte Stimmungen, sodann die Akte des Meinens, Stellungennehmens, Wertens, Urteils, Denkens und Wollens, endlich das Innwerden des Selbstes: Ich-B., Selbst B., Selbstgefühl, Selbstwertgefühl. [. . .] Seine (mikrokosmische) Struktur schiebt sich zwischen einwirkenden Reiz und darauffolgende Reaktion, zwischen Organismus und Umwelt."
13. Compare Judith Ryan, pp. 559-60.
14. See Wilhelm Hehlmann, p. 61: "Inhalte und Vollzüge des bewußten Lebens werden durch sprachliche Formulierung artikuliert."
15. See Judith Ryan, pp. 557-58.
16. See Heinrich Schmidt and Georgi Schischkoff, Philosophisches Wörterbuch, p. 76: "[. . .] das Bewußtsein besitzt eine aus dem individuellen Mikrokosmos herleitbare Struktur (Bezugssystem), durch die jeder Inhalt sofort in eigentümlicher Weise gestaltet und zu den übrigen Inhalten in

Wechselbeziehung gesetzt wird."

17. See Judith Ryan, p. 556.
18. Peter Heller, "On not Understanding Kafka", German Quarterly, 47 (May 1974), p. 383.
19. See Karl August Horst, Anatomy and Trends of 20th Century German Literature, translated by Elizabeth Thompson (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagsanstalt, 1964), especially p. 29:
"It would seem that in periods when the cultural edifice starts to totter because people have ceased to believe in the former scale of values, man becomes conscious of his originally undefined nature. He feels himself no more the site on which a multitude of tendencies meet and interact. He becomes aware of the foundations of his being sinking ever more deeply down to the original strata of pre-conscious life, over which his controlling experience has no power."
20. George Avery, Inquiry and Testament (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), p. 257.

II. Amerika (Der Verschollene)¹

The dilemma which lies at the base of the struggle in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes" is still occupying Kafka a few years later, for it dominates his first novel: life can not simultaneously be accepted as a "concrete" reality and observed from an objective--transcendental--viewpoint. In the early story we find this problem represented in largely abstract form. In Amerika the struggle is illustrated with plot and imagery characteristic of a novel. The abstract concept of the shorter work is translated into situations and events, which seem "real" to the hero Karl Rossmann, if not to the reader.

It is tempting to read the book as a "social novel"--as one would read, for instance, Dickens' David Copperfield. The young hero is sent to the United States as a steerage passenger by his parents because their servant girl had become pregnant. What follows are eight episodes, beginning as Karl's ship docks in New York harbor and breaking off after he has joined a theatre company and is traveling by train through a mountain range on his way to Oklahoma. While still on board the ship, Karl defends a German stoker, who claims to be the victim of a Rumanian's prejudice, in the presence of the ship's officers. Although the case is lost, Karl's uncle, a rich senator, appears and takes his nephew home to a promising future. The stoker is not so lucky; Karl regrets forsaking him. The uncle's residence proves to be a large business complex, which is equipped with all the technical innovations typical of industrial society. Working conditions at the uncle's business seem to border on the inhumane:

Im Saal der Telephone gingen, wohin man schaute, die Türen der Telephonzellen auf und zu und das Läuten war sinnverwirrend. [. . .] Mitten durch den Saal war ein beständiger Verkehr von hin- und hergejagten Leuten. Keiner grüßte, das Grüßen war abgeschafft, jeder schloß sich den Schritten des ihm Vorhergehenden an und sah auf den Boden, auf dem er möglichst rasch vorwärtskommen wollte [. . .] .
[52-53]

Some time later Karl drives to Pollunder's country-house to spend an evening with this business acquaintance of his uncle, only to learn that his uncle has repudiated him. The uncle's and Pollunder's abundant luxury is a contrast to the poorer quarters of the city:

Es war eine Raumverschwendung sondergleichen, und Karl dachte an die östlichen New Yorker Quartiere, die ihm der Onkel zu zeigen versprochen hatte, wo angeblich in einem kleinen Zimmer mehrere Familien wohnten und das Heim einer Familie in einem Zimmerwinkel bestand [. . .]. Und hier standen so viele Zimmer leer und waren nur dazu da, um hohl zu klingen, wenn man an die Tür schlug. [76]

Karl decides to leave. He sets out after midnight on foot, meeting two vagabonds named Robinson and Delamarche. These two can not find work in New York. Karl accompanies them as far as the "Hotel Occidental", where he acquires a position as lift-boy. He is forced to work twelve hours a day (24 hours once per week), operating an elevator which runs essentially automatically. There he makes friends with the orphan Therese Berchtold and learns that her starving mother was the victim of an industrial accident. Although a devoted worker, Karl is dismissed from his post after leaving the elevator for a few minutes in order to help his old acquaintance Robinson. Finding himself again an outsider, and following a narrow escape from a policeman, Karl moves into Brunelda's flat with the two vagabonds, where he is treated more as a prisoner than guest. Karl there views a political rally, which precedes an election in which the "better" candidate would have no chance to be elected:

'Er ist kein unfähiger Mensch und seinen politischen Ansichten und seiner politischen Vergangenheit nach wäre gerade er der passende Richter für den Bezirk. Aber kein Mensch denkt daran, daß er gewählt werden könnte, er wird so prachtvoll durchfallen, als man durchfallen kann, er wird für die Wahlkampagne seine paar Dollars hinausgeworfen haben, das wird alles sein.' [262]

This seventh chapter has no proper ending; Kafka wrote a final chapter, however--the "happy ending"--wherein all of Karl's problems are finally resolved.

II.1. Consciousness and Reality (Narrative Methods)

The novel is written in the third-person past tense, but the author never presumes to know more than his fictional hero. Reality is viewed through the consciousness of the central figure.²

The first description of the outside world is that of New York and its harbor. It occurs as Karl gains entry to the administrative offices of the ship. As he had prepared to disembark, he had suddenly recalled a

forgotten umbrella, ran below decks, panicked after losing his way, and met the stoker. There follows a dispute between this man and his superior in the captain's cabin. About to defend the stoker, whom he believes to be more helpless than himself, Karl looks through the windows:

Vor den drei Fenstern des Zimmers sah er die Wellen des Meeres, und bei Betrachtung ihrer fröhlichen Bewegung schlug ihm das Herz, als hätte er nicht fünf lange Tage das Meer ununterbrochen gesehen. Große Schiffe kreuzten gegenseitig ihre Wege und gaben dem Wellenschlag nur so weit nach, als es ihre Schwere erlaubte. [. . .] Die kleinen Schiffchen und Boote konnte man, wenigstens von der Tür aus, nur in der Ferne beobachten, wie sie in Mengen in die Öffnungen zwischen den großen Schiffen einliefen. Hinter alledem aber stand New York und sah Karl mit hunderttausend Fenstern seiner Wolkenkratzer an. Ja, in diesem Zimmer wußte man, wo man war. [19-20]

Four pages later the captain is actually present and the stoker's case--along with Karl's euphoric self-assurance--is lost. He sees:

Inzwischen ging vor den Fenstern das Hafenleben weiter, ein flaches Lastschiff mit einem Berg von Fässern, die wunderbar verstaut sein mußten, daß sie nicht ins Rollen kamen, zog verüber und erzeugte in dem Zimmer fast Dunkelheit [. . .]. Eigentümliche Schwimmkörper tauchten hie und da selbständig aus dem ruhelosen Wasser, wurden gleich wieder überschwemmt und versanken vor dem erstaunten Blick; Boote der Ozeandampfer wurden von heiß arbeitenden Matrosen vorwärtsgerudert und waren voll von Passagieren, die darin, so wie man sie hineingezwängt hatte, still und erwartungsvoll saßen, wenn es auch manche nicht unterlassen konnten, die Köpfe nach den wechselnden Szenarien zu drehen. Eine Bewegung ohne Ende, eine Unruhe, übertragen von dem unruhigen Element auf die hilflosen Menschen und ihre Werke! [24-25]

Placing these two passages side-by-side makes the subjective character of the narration obvious. In the second quotation a ship appears to be on the verge of losing its load, while before the "große" ships sailed "ihre Wege" without being affected by the waves. The "fröhliche Bewegung" of the water has become "ruhelos" and "unruhig", what are apparently buoys seem isolated and helpless, passengers have been "forced" into small boats which earlier could hardly be observed, and these are sitting "still und erwartungsvoll, although some "nicht unterlassen konnten", to watch the "wechselnden" sceneries. The lucid image of the skyscrapers is replaced by the darkness of a passing "Lastschiff". The general progression is from large to small, from a sense of control to helplessness. The transformation occurs on all levels; the reference to the self becomes most evident in the respective concluding summation of each impression. The

description refers to a world without any reality of its own.³ It is a question of what portions of reality Karl selects (e.g. Manhattan skyline or rowboat), not just how he perceives it (e.g. the large boats). Karl's thoughts and perceptions are determined by numerable variables. The narrative is based on the system of personal values and interests with which Karl has come to see the world, but also on the prejudices which can never be completely sublimated,⁴ his mood, his viewpoint (e.g. behind some windows and therefore sharply limited), and the intensity with which an event or a combination of events is experienced.⁵ (For instance, Karl is mainly preoccupied with the stoker's hearing and thus can not carefully observe the harbor traffic.)

Kafka adheres to Karl's perception of reality throughout the novel; there is no foreshadowing or retardation of events by the narrator.⁶ Although Karl meets his uncle early in the first chapter, neither Karl nor the reader is aware of it. On page 32 "Herr Jakob" is designated "der Herr mit dem Bambusstöckchen". After this "hartnäckige Frager" has asked Karl for his name, and Karl has replied, we read:

'Aber', sagte der mit Jakob Angesprochene und trat zuerst fast ungläubig zurück. Auch der Kapitän, der Oberkassier, der Schiffsoffizier, ja sogar der Diener zeigten deutlich ein übermäßiges Erstaunen wegen Karls Namen. Nur die Herren von der Hafenbehörde und Schubal verhielten sich gleichgültig. [31]

The surprise of the first group of men is actually not "übermäßig", since they all realize ("sogar" the servant) that the young man defending the stoker is in fact the senator's nephew. Obviously Karl is the reason for the senator's presence at the ship's offices. Their surprise seems "übermäßig" to Karl, who is not aware of the facts. The harbor officials and Schubal do not react to Karl's name, since they were absent when the uncle must have stated that he was looking for "Karl Rossmann". (Karl was then sitting in the stoker's cabin.) After Karl learns who "Herr Jakob" really is, there follows no summary or clarification of these confusing events.

The continuum of events is defined by the plausible borders of the hero's perspective. This partly explains the "narrowness" and ineffability characteristic of Kafka's prose. The depiction of Pollunder's country-house

is a typical example. Karl arrives at night. He thinks that the building "umfangreicher und höher war, als es sonst für ein Landhaus nötig ist. [. . .] Da nur der untere Teil des Hauses beleuchtet war, konnte man gar nicht bemessen, wie weit es in die Höhe reichte." (60) The house acquires fantastic dimensions because Karl's senses are insufficient to measure it. This becomes particularly obvious after he has suffered through the dinner with Pollunder's guest Herr Green, has fought with Pollunder's daughter Klara, and wants to find his way back to that lit portion of the building which is equipped with electric lighting--in other words, at a time of emotional stress.

Karl war schon an großen Strecken der Wände vorübergekommen, die gänzlich ohne Türen waren, man konnte sich nicht vorstellen, was dahinter war. [75-76]

Dunkle Leere wehte ihm entgegen. [. . .] Wozu diente nur dieser große, tiefe Raum? Man stand ja hier oben wie auf der Galerie einer Kirche. [. . .] Da der Gang kein Ende nehmen wollte, nirgends ein Fenster einen Ausblick gab, weder in der Höhe noch in der Tiefe sich etwas rührte, dachte Karl schon, er gehe immerfort im gleichen Kreisgang in der Runde [. . .] . [77]

Descriptions of architecture reoccur throughout the novel and are relatively easy to trace back to perspective viewpoints. Nevertheless, there is no possibility for the reader to construct an image that would correspond to a general experience of reality. As Barbara Beutner states,

Es entsteht keine Welt in ihrer 'natürlichen' Komplexität, sondern eine Welt, die aus dem Blickwinkel eines beschränkten Individuums wahrgenommen wird und ihre Charakteristika aus der Seele dieses Einzelnen bezieht.⁷

This way of description can also be observed in the characterizations. No individual in the novel is endowed with a definite personality. All are presented in terms of vague, general attributes, always an ambiguous combination of variable subjective impressions and objective "fact".⁸ Herr Green is a typical example. Because he interferes with Karl's hopes to spend an evening alone with the enigmatic Pollunder, all of Green's qualities and actions are interpreted to his disadvantage.

Herr Green [. . .] schob Karl und Klara vor sich in das Speisezimmer, das besonders infolge der Blumen auf dem Tische, die sich aus Streifen frischen Laubes halb aufrichteten, sehr festlich aussah und dop-

-pelt die Anwesenheit des störenden Herrn Green bedauern ließ. [63]
 Green simply mentions his surprise that Karl was granted permission to visit Pollunder, but Karl reacts strongly:

'Nicht genug, daß er sich hier unnötig einmischt [. . .']. [63]
 Green cuts his meat with "scharfen Schnitten" and chews it in such a manner as to make Karl ill:

[. . .] Herr Green [. . .] führte einen Bissen in den Mund, wo die Zunge, wie Karl zufällig bemerkte, mit einem Schwunge die Speise ergriff. Ihm wurde fast übel und er stand auf. [65]

The border between humour and irony is vague and unsure, although several passages seem to contain clearly humorous overtones. Karl's early-morning meeting with Robinson and Delamarche is a good example. Karl's future had been altered by his uncle's letter. Alone for the first time, beaten by Klara, lost in the middle of the night, he had been given a room containing no empty beds. Karl unpacks the suitcase that had just been returned to him and which appears to be symbolic of his return to the unsettled circumstances he had originally faced on the ship:

Nicht das Geringste fehlte. [. . .] Das einzig Bedauerliche war, daß die Veroneser Salami, die auch nicht fehlte, allen Sachen ihren Geruch mitgeteilt hatte. Wenn sich das nicht durch irgendein Mittel beseitigen ließ, hatte Karl die Aussicht, monatelang in diesen Geruch eingehüllt herumzugehen. [101]

Suspecting that the two strangers in his room may be thieves, Karl reacts:

- Unangenehm war bloß, daß der eine Irländer war. Karl wußte nicht mehr genau, in welchem Buch er einmal zu Hause gelesen hatte, daß man sich in Amerika vor den Irländern hüten solle. [. . .] Nun wollte er wenigstens mit der Kerze [. . .] diesen Irländer genauer ansehen, wobei er fand, daß gerade dieser erträglicher aussah als der Franzose. Er hatte sogar noch eine Spur von runden Wangen und lächelte im Schlaf ganz freundlich. [103; my underlinings]

The humour is based on the inadequacy of Karl's thoughts and actions in situations contrived by Kafka; it is comedy of situation. What seems ironic is Kafka's narrating as if he did not know that, for example, Karl's superficial appraisals of the two men were ludicrous. Kafka only promotes distance with the underlined restrictive words; they make excessive qualifications. Their omission changes the tone of the passage from ironic to serious. Kafka avoids complicated intellectual rationalizations, espe-

-cially at those critical and serious moments in Karl's story. After the hero has been dismissed from his elevator post, we find the head-porter's explanations formulated in terms of a general insult, not moral-philosophical justifications:

'Wenn du nicht frech und ungezogen gewesen wärest, gelogen, gelumpt, gesoffen und gestohlen hättest, hätte ich dich vielleicht bei so einem Fenster anstellen können, denn dazu kann ich ausschließlich nur vernagelte Köpfe brauchen.' [196]

These passages are indicative of a narrator who has constructed situations in order to illustrate a theme beyond the comprehension of the hero. As Hans Reiss suggests--and as the above quotations show--the humour is a by-product of the hero's excessive seriousness and rationalism. "Es kommentiert drastisch die Verranntheit der menschlichen Vernunft sowie jedes rationalen Vorgehens."⁹ For Karl the world is unequivocal, but for the reader it becomes ambiguous in the broadest sense of the word.

The author's short summation of the hero's past in the opening paragraph of the novel also induces the reader to give up traditional conceptions of an omnipresent narrator.¹⁰ The beginning, essentially a parody of 19th Century novel openings, estranges the reader by summarizing the hero's past and embarking into the story proper before arriving at the first full stop: too much is left unsaid.

Als der sechzehnjährige Karl Roßmann, der von seinen armen Eltern nach Amerika geschickt worden war, weil ihn ein Dienstmädchen verführt und ein Kind von ihm bekommen hatte, in dem schon langsam gewordenen Schiff in den Hafen von New York einfuhr, erblickte er die schon längst beobachtete Statue der Freiheitsgöttin wie in einem plötzlich stärker gewordenen Sonnenlicht. [11]

Kafka's propensity for moral and social clichés and stereotypes in Amerika is striking as well: Karl's "poor" parents, the overworked stoker, the self-made man (Uncle Jakob), the millionaire playboy Mack, the picaresque vagabonds on the open road, the tyrannic bosses and the sympathetic immigrant at the hotel, etc. The book is composed similar to a classical "Bildungsroman": a naive adolescent in search of an identity and social role is bounced from one social milieu to another. Then there is the fairy-tale solution in the final chapter (see II.5. below), which is so incongruous with the other elements. This startling juxtaposition of literary models

from the past with a modern complexity and ambiguity--that are created stylistically--anticipates the Brechtian application of "Verfremdungseffekte".

As the above examples indicate, the reader is compelled to interpolate between Karl's thought processes and Kafka's fictional reality.¹¹ Karl himself can only be understood through the methods of his thinking and perception; neither he nor other characters nor objects are represented as fixed unities.¹² Nothing, as Martin Walser states, is "true" in the psychological sense, "real" in the empirical sense, "human" in the anthropological sense, or "natural" in the biological sense.¹³ We have already seen a fragmentation of perspective in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes", demonstrated by the introduction of a split narrator. There, however, the story is narrated in the first person with the confusing result that we have what are essentially four different, yet interrelated narrators. Amerika is told in the third-person past tense, which makes for narrative unity and creates a distance between hero and reader.¹⁴ The reader assumes the function of Karl's reflective consciousness or "zweites Ich" and draws his own conclusions about the relationship between impression and world. Removed in time and place, he can gain insights into the fluctuating mode of Karl's thinking, although nothing is directly stated about Karl's inner life. Jörgen Kobs concludes:

Der unschätzbare Beitrag des Dichters Kafka zur Theorie der menschlichen Erkenntnis liegt darin, daß er die 'empirische Realität' des Bewußtseins transparent macht auf das eine, wahre, unwandelbare Sein. Für den Leser gewinnen die erzählten Ereignisse durch das Prinzip der einsinnigen Darstellung transzendente Idealität (wiederum Kantisch formuliert). Die Sphäre der 'Dinge an sich' ist damit freilich nicht in positiver Bestimmtheit erreicht.¹⁵

Kafka's intricate narrative mode is probably best explained by Heinz Hillmann's description of a narrator,

der trotz seiner konsequenten Held-Perspektive, also trotz seiner nur von einem Subjekt aus erzählenden Einseitigkeit, immer das Ganze im Auge behält und überschaut. Die Held-Perspektive ist also nur ein Teil seines gesamten Blickwinkels. Er hält sie ein, weil er das Ich des Einzelnen in seinem hoffnungslosen Kampf mit dem Ganzen verfolgen will, das heißt, es geht ihm um das Dasein dieses einen Einzelnen.¹⁶

II.2. The Struggle of the Hero

Two basic urges underlay Karl's thinking and behaviour. These are the need to identify with and belong to American society and the conflicting desire to retain personal freedom and subjectivity. These two tendencies provide the narration with a structure and the plot with its fundamental impulses; they can be traced throughout the first six episodes. To define these two conflicting tendencies means to clarify Karl's struggle and its development.

The importance which social roles have for Karl is evident already in the earliest portions of the book. At first Karl distrusts the stranger he has met below decks, but as soon as he learns the man's social role, i.e. that he is the ship's stoker, he reverses his attitude.

'Kennen Sie sich auf dem Schiff aus' fragte Karl mißtrauisch [. . .]. 'Ich bin doch Schiffsheizer', sagte der Mann. 'Sie sind Schiffsheizer!' rief Karl freudig, als überstiege das alle Erwartungen, und sah, den Ellbogen aufgestützt, den Mann näher an. [14]

Karl's memories of the association between his father and his father's employees provide Karl with a useful view of the present situation; traditional social values can now serve as the basis of his conceptions.

[. . .] solche Leute [e.g. the stoker] sind leicht gewonnen, wenn man ihnen **irgendeine** Kleinigkeit zusteckt, das wußte Karl von seinem Vater her, welcher durch Zigarrenverteilung alle die niedrigen Angestellten gewann, mit denen er geschäftlich zu tun hatte. [17]

Karl respects the ship's order enough to criticize the stoker's vague and inarticulate arguments in the ship's offices, thereby confirming his respect for a certain social discipline as against the priority of individuals.

Karl sagte also zum Heizer: 'Sie müssen das einfacher erklären, klarer, der Herr Kapitän kann es nicht würdigen, so wie Sie es ihm erzählen. Kennt er denn alle Maschinisten und Laufburschen beim Namen oder gar beim Taufnamen [. . .]?' [26]

At his uncle's residence Karl is impressed with the need to learn English so as to permit communication. He acknowledges the success of his uncle's New York enterprises:

'Du hast es wirklich weit gebracht', sagte Karl einmal auf einem dieser Gänge durch den Betrieb, auf dessen Durchsicht man viele Tage verwenden mußte, selbst wenn man jede Abteilung gerade nur gesehen haben wollte. [53]

Karl willingly accepts Pollunder's invitation to spend an evening in the country away from his daily routine, although Uncle Jakob had granted him permission only reluctantly. Nevertheless, once at the country-house, Karl regrets his "unfolgsame" and "starrköpfige" (68) disobedience of his uncle's will and **would go** back to his New York home. Karl is, moreover, conscious that his social well-being is dependent on the rich uncle, recognizes his responsibility, and knows how to value his situation.

'Solange meine Englischstudien nicht abgeschlossen sind und ich mich im praktischen Handel nicht genügend umgesehen habe, bin ich gänzlich auf die Güte meines Onkels angewiesen, die ich allerdings als Blutsverwandter genießen darf. Sie dürfen nicht glauben, daß ich schon jetzt irgendwie mein Brot anständig--und vor allem anderen soll mich Gott bewahren--verdienen könnte. [. . .] Ich erwähne das alles, um Ihnen zu zeigen, wie abhängig ich von meinem Onkel bin und wie verpflichtet infolgedessen ich ihm gegenüber bin.' [82-83]

Once on his own, Karl continues to respect the order he associates with the uncle's firm.

Sie [Robinson and Delamarche] mußten durchaus nicht glauben, daß sie zu gut waren, um in die Dienste des Onkels zu treten. [108]

Karl justifies the exodus to "Butterford" with the reason that

[. . .] es vielleicht besser sei, an einen Ort zu kommen, wo die Möglichkeit der Rückkehr in die Heimat keine so leichte sei. Gewiß werde er dort besser arbeiten und vorwärtskommen, da ihn keine unnützen Gedanken hindern würden. [110]

In general Karl is impressed with the importance of a social position and therefore grants Robinson's and Delamarche's vagabond existence little value. This is formulated very pointedly as Karl first gains entry into the Hotel Occidental:

Die Oberköchin schien das als eine angenehme Nachricht aufzufassen. 'Dann sind Sie also frei?' fragte sie. 'Ja, frei bin ich', sagte Karl, und nichts schien ihm wertloser. [130]

Immer schwebte ihm [Karl] der Gedanke vor Augen, es könne schließlich mit ihm, wenn er nicht fleißig sei, so weit kommen wie mit Delamarche und Robinson. [141]

Therefore Karl's enormous zeal to begin work immediately in the hotel. As a lift boy his elevator is "am besten geputzt" (143): he proves to be an extremely conscientious worker. During the buying trips with Therese Berchtold in nearby "Ramses", Karl is hardly the shy boy he had been with most of his previous companions.

[. .] er rief über Menschenmauern sein noch immer etwas überspitztes, aus hundert Stimmen leicht herauszuhörendes Englisch hin, er ging auf die Leute ohne Zögern zu, und mochten sie sich hochmütig in die Tiefe der längsten Geschäftssäle zurückgezogen haben. Er tat es nicht aus Übermut und würdigte jeden Widerstand, aber er fühlte sich in einer sicheren Stellung, die ihm Rechte gab, das Hotel Occidental war eine Kundschaft, deren man nicht spotten durfte [. . .] . [148-49]

Karl's transformation is here notably based on the integration of his personality with a larger, more important part of society. The hotel is the "Kundschaft", not Karl as an individual.

The key passages above illustrate how important it is for the hero to feel part of a social collective and to identify with it. On the other hand, it is possible to demonstrate that Karl lives apart from the "law", exhibiting subjective tendencies towards individuality.

There is firstly Karl's failure in his social role in Europe (the servant's pregnancy), which leads to his banishment to America--the proverbially free country in the mind of Europeans. The scene of Karl's arrival is full of deeper meaning: Karl gazes at the Statue of Liberty instead of disembarking with the other passengers, and is literally shoved aside:

'So hoch!' sagte er sich und wurde, wie er so gar nicht an das Weggehen dachte, von der immer mehr anschwellenden Menge der Gepäckträger, die an ihm vorüberzogen, allmählich bis an das Bordgeländer geschoben. [11]

Karl's return to the interior of the ship and his involvement with the stoker represent a continuation of his conflict with social order. Karl subsequently upsets discipline in the ship's administrative offices by insisting that the stoker's case be heard. It is also obvious that Karl is emotionally attached to the stoker and what he represents. This man's rambling and desorganized complaints, his memories, his general helplessness, and even his occupation on the depths of the ship delineate a sphere diametrically opposed to that of the ship's order. Karl's most striking character note in the first chapter is probably the despondence he feels after hearing that a rich uncle has arrived to take him home. Karl's thoughts revert to memories of Europe and then to the stoker's problem, which remains more important to him than all the events pertaining to his new situ-

-ation.¹⁷ The first chapter leaves the reader with the impression of Karl's individualistic traits. In the second chapter the uncle seems to be Karl's antagonist. This character loves military marches, is a "man of principles", who opposes sentimental thinking and impulsive or spontaneous action. He is naturally averse to Karl's predilection for the amazing desk with "hundert Fächer verschiedenster Größe" (46), for music (48), and standing on the balcony (45-46):

Er [the uncle] habe Neuankömmlinge gekannt, die zum Beispiel statt nach diesen guten Grundsätzen sich zu verhalten, tagelang auf ihrem Balkon gestanden und wie verlorene Schafe auf die Straße hinuntergesehen hätten. [45]

Sleep is also considered an unsocial extravagance. Karl's daily schedule in New York compels him to wake up at 4:30 a.m.; he lies in the shower, however, with his eyes closed and recalls the privacy of his sleep.

Wie in dem noch ein wenig fortlaufenden Genusse des Schlafes lag er da und fing besonders gern mit den geschlossenen Augenlidern die letzten, einzeln fallenden Tropfen auf, die sich dann öffneten und über das Gesicht hinflossen. [51]

The "sleep" metaphor is used once again in connection with the pleasure Karl derives from his riding lessons.

Nach einer halben Stunde solchen wie Schlaf vergehenden Vergnügens [. . .] . [51]

The description of the communications department in his uncle's business discloses not only the strict order maintained, but also Karl's partiality for emotions as a "human element" in the midst of business transactions.

[. . .] oft sah man sogar, daß er [an employee] vielleicht gegen den Sprecher etwas einzuwenden hatte, ihn etwas genauer fragen wollte, aber gewisse Worte, die er hörte, zwangen ihn, ehe er seine Absicht ausführen konnte, die Augen zu senken und zu schreiben. [. . .] Mitten durch den Saal war ein beständiger Verkehr von hin- und hergejagten Leuten. Keiner grüßte, das Grüßen war abgeschafft [. . .] . [53]

Karl immerses himself into events rather than just observing them. He searches for recognition and fulfillment, not just an understanding of and adjustment to the organization of the world. Karl's initial disappointment at the country-house is that Pollunder must spend the evening discussing business with Green, rather than indulge in personal talk with Karl. Similarly Karl's urge to surprise his uncle in bed the following morning is based on the need for personal communication rather than on the uncle's dominant characteristics of organization and achievement.

Dann wollte er anklopfen und auf das förmliche 'Herein!' ins Zimmer laufen und den lieben Onkel, den er bisher immer nur bis hoch hinauf angezogen und zugeknöpft kannte, aufrecht im Bette sitzend, die Augen erstaunt zur Tür gerichtet, im Nachthemd überraschen. [67-68]

As Karl is about to leave New York with Robinson and Delamarche, he is instinctively hesitant, since his old identity (home and past) lies in the opposite direction.

Vieles erinnerte Karl an seine Heimat und er wußte nicht, ob er gut daran tue, New York zu verlassen und in das Innere des Landes zu gehen. In New York war das Meer und zu jeder Zeit die Möglichkeit der Rückkehr in die Heimat. Und so blieb er stehen und sagte zu seinen beiden Begleitern, er habe doch wieder Lust, in New York zu bleiben. [109-10]

Karl's refusal to give up his past (which makes him an individual) also explains his profound attachment to his suitcase and picture of his parents (see especially pp. 127-29). Another instance when Karl fails to recognize the common order occurs in the hotel restaurant, where Karl refuses to join the shoving crowd of customers and therefore does not get served. Later Karl is disappointed because he has little control over the operation and nothing to do with the maintenance of his elevator. The importance of his decision to aid his old comrade Robinson in the sixth chapter needs hardly be emphasized; this implicitly personal gesture (Karl leaves his elevator post for a few minutes) results in the hero's "trial" and subsequent dismissal from the hotel.

Karl's ideals oscillate between two mutually-exclusive poles: subjectivity and objectivity, individual and society, freedom and organisation.¹⁸ Kafka's America, as it is manifested in the uncle's residence and in the hotel, requires resignation to the principles of discipline and common order. Karl, as we have seen, is prepared to devote all of his concentration to whatever is required (e.g. English lessons or lift duties), but does not maintain a continuous exclusion of private needs. He is forced into his struggle by attempting to fulfill these (admittedly vague) personal requirements. Ambivalence, defined by Hermann Pongs as a condition of the between, a fluctuating between values,¹⁹ is the characteristic trait of Karl's existential value judgements.²⁰

The movement of Karl's thinking is best described as antithetical. He is convinced that the stoker's case is important enough to interrupt the ship's order, but conversely admonishes the stoker for doing that very thing. Karl is frightened about disembarking the ship as an outsider in a foreign country, but feels remorseful when his freedom is lost in favour of a well-defined social position. He is preoccupied with finding a release from or compensation for the delimitation of his personality at the uncle's--but as soon as Karl encounters a confusing situation in the country (Klara, the labyrinthic building, unstructured time), he realizes the value of his life with the uncle without appreciating the casual relationships he had missed while still in New York. With the uncle's rejection of his nephew and the appearance of Robinson and Delamarche, Karl is presented with an opportunity to realize his dream of establishing a "basically human" relationship without formalistic lies. Yet his (initial) response to the two men (whom he finds asleep in the early hours of the morning) is to awaken them with an absurdly lengthy and pedantic introduction (102). Ironically, Karl thinks that Robinson and Delamarche later introduce themselves with "einer gewissen Förmlichkeit" (105). Although Karl had hoped for greater intimacy when sharing a meal with the uncle--

[. . .] vielleicht würden sie [Karl and his uncle] infolge dieser Art Frühstück [. . .] öfters als wie bisher bloß einmal während des Tages zusammenkommen und dann natürlich auch offener miteinander reden können. [68]

--he can only worry about money as he eats with his two new companions.

Verbittert wurde das Essen für Karl außerdem dadurch, daß es sehr fraglich war, wie das Essen gezahlt werden sollte. [113]

Thus it seems that when Karl encounters "freedom" in a relatively viable form, he reacts by reconfirming the validity of repressive norms: he deserts his new friends and seeks employment in the Hotel Occidental. There he is hardly companionable in the dormitory, being preoccupied with serving the institution.

Es gab allerdings auch einige [employees], die um jeden Preis schlafen wollten--Karl gehörte meist zu ihnen [. . .] . [. . .] immer wieder schien es ihm, daß alle anderen in ihrem Leben einen Vorsprung vor ihm hatten, den er mit fleißigerer Arbeit und wenig Verzichtleistung ausgleichen müsse. [146-47]

Karl is naive; he fails to grasp the conflict in his thinking and behaviour.

This realization is left entirely to the reader, who must draw the relevant parallels between various points in the narrative.²¹ Karl struggles without really knowing it and, perhaps for this reason, experiences a persistent feeling of insecurity.

Karl's problem becomes obvious again in the seventh chapter ("Ein Asyl"). There a student, Brunelda's neighbor, attempts to unite personal matters (his studies) and social demands (work), using a purposeful methodology, which leaves him no time for sleep.

'Ja, schlafen!' sagte der Student. 'Schlafen werde ich, wenn ich mit meinem Studium fertig bin. Vorläufig trinke ich schwarzen Kaffee.' [. . .] 'Daß ich meinen Posten bei Montly bekommen habe, ist der bisher größte Erfolg meines Lebens gewesen. Wenn ich zwischen dem Studium und meinem Posten zu wählen hätte, würde ich natürlich den Posten wählen. Meine Anstrengung geht nur darauf hin, die Notwendigkeit einer solchen Wahl nicht eintreten zu lassen.' [260-62]

The student's "solution" demonstrates a more consequential appraisal of the existential question than Karl's. Although the hero has nowhere to go if he leaves Brunelda's apartment, he rejects Delamarche's offer of employment as a servant, failing to accept the necessity of resignation and compromise.

'Haben Sie denn eine andere Stellung?' fragte der Student.

'Nein', sagte Karl, 'aber daran liegt mir nichts, wenn ich nur von hier fort wäre.'

'Hören Sie einmal', sagte der Student, 'daran liegt Ihnen nichts?' [259]

Nevertheless, the student's sleepless struggle is its own demonstration of inadequacy. At the end of this chapter Karl once again expresses the naive conviction that he will be able to find satisfaction by acquiring a new position.

Wenn aber Karl einmal einen solchen Posten in einem Büro hätte, dann wollte er sich mit nichts anderem beschäftigen als mit seinen Büroarbeiten und nicht die Kräfte zersplittern wie der Student. Wenn es nötig sein sollte, wollte er auch die Nacht fürs Büro verwenden, was man ja im Beginn bei seiner kaufmännischen Vorbildung sowieso von ihm verlangen würde. Er wollte nur an das Interesse des Geschäftes denken, dem er zu dienen hätte [. . .] . [264]

Ironically, Karl's "good" intentions are here the product of a tired mind, which, on the verge of sleep (not in a tangible daytime situation), can

easily believe that its personal needs have been met.

Beruhigend fiel ihm ein, als er die Augen schloß, daß er noch jung war [. . .]. In solchen Gedanken schlief Karl ein [. . .]. [264]

Karl's struggle evidences several parallels to that of the narrator in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes". Karl senses the same ineffable "guilt" and encounters the same ambivalence, which, as said, negates the inherent validity of every self-evident position. A duality, which is dealt with by using a split subject in the early story, occurs in Amerika in terms of clearly discernable private and non-private needs. Perhaps most striking is the night-student's logical, but grotesque extension of Karl's efforts--reminiscent of the lung-metaphor used in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes". (See p. 8 above.) Each image expresses both the necessity and the hopelessness of the situation. Just as the hero of "Beschreibung eines Kampfes", Karl experiences an internal instability. There it could be observed in the loss of internal unity (the antagonism between narrator and acquaintance); here it becomes especially obvious in Karl's relationships with women and in his perceptive processes (the "acquaintance" relates well to women, Karl not).

Karl is and remains sexually naive, although he succeeds in making his parents' servant pregnant.

'Karl, o du mein Karl!' rief sie, als sähe sie ihn und bestätige sich seinen Besitz, während er nicht das Geringste sah und sich unbehaglich in dem vielen warmen Bettzeug fühlte [. . .]. Dann legte sie sich auch zu ihm [. . .], drückte ihren nackten Bauch an seinen Leib, suchte mit der Hand, so widerlich, daß Karl Kopf und Hals aus den Kissen herausschüttelte, zwischen seinen Beinen, stieß dann den Bauch einige Male gegen ihn,--ihm war, als sei sie ein Teil seiner selbst, und vielleicht aus diesem Grunde hatte ihn eine entsetzliche Hilfsbedürftigkeit ergriffen. [36]

He views sex in terms of struggle and possession, an intrusion on "seiner selbst". Pollunder's daughter Klara also seems to be sexually attracted to the hero:

'Lassen Sie mich', flüsterte sie, das erhitzte Gesicht eng an seinem, er mußte sich anstrengen, sie zu sehen, so nahe war sie ihm. 'Lassen Sie mich, ich werde Ihnen etwas Schönes geben.' 'Warum seufzt sie so', dachte Karl, 'es kann ihr nicht wehtun, ich drücke sie ja nicht' [. . .]. [71]

Karl is equally sober as he meets Theresa in the hotel (in his room, late at night), regarding natural human relationships in a formalistic context²²:

[Karl:] '[. . .] ich denke, ich werde bleiben.'

'Das wäre nämlich gut', sagte sie und fuhr mit dem Taschentuch über ihr Gesicht, 'ich bin hier nämlich so allein.'

'Das wundert mich', sagte Karl. 'Die Frau Oberköchin ist doch sehr freundlich zu Ihnen.' [137; my underlining]

Brunelda--what we know of her--remains a more enigmatic figure than the women mentioned above. She would be "ein Stück tropischer Primitivität inmitten der verderbten Zivilisation eines Vorstadtviertels" with her sex, baths, perfume and disorder. "Sie folgt den Vagabunden, weil sie außerhalb der Gesellschaft stehen [. . .]." ²³ Karl finds Brunelda revolting. She is a poignant contrast to the sterility of his struggle; intellectually he wants nothing more than a well-defined role in society. Karl's naiveté concerning sexual and emotional processes illustrates the split between mind and organism. Unconscious of the fluctuating goals of his struggle, Karl remains passive and helpless.

The capricious quality of Karl's conscious processes can more easily be observed in the context of perception. Karl would like--quite literally--to survey the totality of his world. From his room at the uncle's residence Karl can see only one street:

Was [. . .] in der Heimatstadt Karls wohl der höchste Aussichtspunkt gewesen wäre, gestattete hier nicht viel mehr als den Überblick über eine Straße, die zwischen zwei Reihen förmlich abgehackter Häuser gerade, und darum wie fliehend, in die Ferne sich verlief [. . .].
[44]

But even here Karl notes the borders where his senses reach their limitations. This occurs again as Karl is riding towards the country at the end of Chapter Two:

Durchquerte dann das Automobil, aus dunkleren, dumpf hallenden Gassen kommend, eine dieser, ganzen Plätzen gleichenden, großen Straßen, dann erschienen nach beiden Seiten hin in Perspektiven, denen niemand bis zum Ende folgen konnte, die Trottoirs [. . .]. [58-59]

As Karl leaves New York in the fourth chapter, he finally has the entire city in front of him, but it eludes his perception and understanding.

Alles in beiden Riesenstädten schien leer und nutzlos aufgestellt. Unter den Häusern gab es kaum einen Unterschied zwischen den großen und den kleinen. In der unsichtbaren Tiefe der Straßen ging wahrscheinlich das Leben fort nach seiner Art, aber über ihnen war nichts zu sehen als ein leichter Dunst [. . .] . [110]

Watching a political rally from Brunelda's flat in the seventh chapter, Karl is too far above the street to hear the actual speeches or read the party slogans. In other words, the entire spectacle can have only a formal interest for him. Captivated with the general commotion, he fails to appreciate the value of Brunelda's binoculars, which would almost simultaneously allow him to view both the particulars and maintain a general view. Instead he wants to descend to the rally personally (where he could no longer view it in its entirety):

[. . .] voll Lust auf die Straße zu gehen und alles von der Nähe anzusehen, suchte er sich nun mit aller Kraft vom Druck Bruneldas zu befreien und sagte: 'Bitte, lassen Sie mich weg.' [248]

Because he can not get out of the apartment, the scene below loses all value for Karl. The duality--specific/ general--inherent in Karl's perception remains in force into the last paragraph of the novel:

Bläulichschwarze Steinmassen gingen in spitzen Keilen bis an den Zug heran,/ man beugte sich aus dem Fenster und suchte vergebens ihre Gipfel,/ dunkle, schmale, zerrissene Täler öffneten sich,/ man beschrieb mit dem Finger die Richtung, in der sie sich verloren[. . .] . [288]

Nature is here an inorganic realm, with no redeeming value, merely reflecting the hero's problem.²⁴ Karl's cognitive processes are dialectic, but lack the possibility of progression to a synthesis.²⁵ A general impression is deceptive and illusory until the details can be scrutinized; details are worthless without a comprehensive view.²⁶ Karl's conceptual world is hopelessly separated from and opposed to the "normal" world--there is no balance or stability.

II.3. The Socially-Critical Tendencies

Karl encounters discontentment and failure in each successive social role: in Europe, on the ship, in New York, at Pollunder's house, with Robinson and Delamarche, at the hotel, and during his first day at Brunelda's flat. An outline of the novel (pp. 20-21 above) shows a multitude of socially-

critical motifs. However, on the basis of what we have observed about the narrative methods and structure, it would seem safe to conclude that the source of his problems does not simply lie on the socio-political plane. Unlike the traditional social novel, Amerika deals extensively with the problem of cognition. Karl is often sensitive to social inequalities, but his problem does not depend on any single aspect of society. He is equally discontent as a millionaire's nephew and as an elevator boy.

Karl defends the stoker against what both consider to be an unjust order. Is the stoker guilty?²⁷ Why is Karl partial to this man? Conversing with the stoker, Karl mentions that people are supposed to be prejudiced against foreigners in the United States. The stoker responds:

'Haben Sie das auch schon erfahren? Na, dann ist's gut. Dann sind Sie mein Mann. Sehen Sie, wir sind doch auf einem deutschen Schiff, es gehört der Hamburg-Amerika-Linie, warum sind wir nicht lauter Deutsche hier? Warum ist der Obermaschinist ein Rumäne? Er heißt Schubal. Das ist doch nicht zu glauben. Und dieser Lumpenhund schindet uns Deutsche auf einem deutschen Schiff!' [15]

The lack of logic in this diatribe against his boss suggests that the stoker's integrity may not be entirely believable. Karl had not yet experienced any prejudice; in fact, the stoker himself (ironically) seems to be a raving nationalist with his "Germans-on-a-German-ship!" Karl not only believes what he hears, but seems inspired by his companion's misery, enough to forget his own position as a lonely immigrant.

'Das dürfen Sie sich nicht gefallen lassen', sagte Karl aufgeregt. Er hatte fast das Gefühl davon verloren, daß er auf dem unsicheren Boden eines Schiffes, an der Küste eines unbekannten Erdteils war, so heimlich war ihm hier auf dem Bett des Heizers zumute. [16]

Therefore, Karl's motives in approaching the ship's bridge are not purely altruistic. His social empathy contains obvious selfish motivations, mainly a hope to regain the self-assurance he had lost as the ship sailed into the harbor. Karl remembers how his father handled office subordinates, thinking to apply similar methods with the stoker (compare p. 28 above) and using him as a sort of "stepping stone". Once in the ship's offices, Karl believes what he wants to believe, ceasing to assimilate new information. The ship's cashier considers the stoker to be "ein be-

-kannter Querulant" (23). The stoker can not voice any justification for his position, excepting personal affronts against the head-machinist Schubal. Schubal defends himself clearly and logically, nevertheless Karl's reaction to this man is:

Und da war also der Feind, frei und frisch im Festanzug [. . .]. [28]

War es nicht das Schuldbewußtsein, das ihm [Schubal] den Verstand schärfte? Und Zeugen hatte er gleich mitgebracht und nannte sie noch außerdem unvoreingenommen und unbeeinflußt? Gaunerei, nichts als Gaunerei! [30]

Obviously, Karl's powers of judgement are faulty, he wants to blame the world. Another blatant instance is the missing photograph of his parents.²⁸ He accuses Robinson and Delamarche of its theft (127-29), forgetting what had transpired the night before. Karl had been looking at this picture:

Das Bild entfiel seinen Händen, dann legte er das Gesicht auf das Bild, dessen Kühle seiner Wange wohltat, und mit einem angenehmen Gefühle schlief er ein. [105]

The following morning a maid had sent him into the hallway as she cleaned the room. She had packed Karl's suitcase and forthwith ordered Karl and his companions downstairs (106). There is no mention of a photograph. These examples throw doubt on the validity of Karl's simplistic categorization of events and characters as "good" or "bad".

Is Karl's querulous reaction to Amerika justifiable? Kafka's real social and cultural criticism would commence at that point where personal value and identity are endangered by the demands of society. The assimilative capacities of the brain are overloaded and the irreconcilability of inner and outer worlds is intensified. These demands make themselves felt hardest through conditions which curtail individual strength. Karl is, for example, constantly deprived of sleep, the one activity that could truly be considered "private". The routine at the uncle's house commences at four-thirty in the morning, at the hotel the length of the work shifts surpasses the capacity for human endurance. Karl does not have one full night's sleep throughout his stay in America! His need to establish a personalized--and therefore human--element in daily transactions is "ignored" by the apparently self-generating forces of the industrialized world.

The situation of the individual is depicted most clearly in the Hotel Occidental. Here Kafka sometimes shifts from Karl's psychological-empirical perspective to a parabolic representation.

Karl is frightened when confronted with an opportunity to enter the "Portierloge" (192-201). (The "Portierloge" is Kafka's way of describing the border-area between normal cognition and an ineffable, extrasensuous realm, if we may judge by the ambiguous, unreal quality of the scene.)

'Komm einmal her', sagte er [the head-porter] dann und führte ihn [Karl] in die große Portierloge, die Karl zwar schon längst einmal anzusehen Lust gehabt hatte, in die er aber jetzt, von dem Portier geschoben, nur mit Mißtrauen eintrat. [192]

Karl feels relatively safe in the room so long as he can be seen by the people outside (its walls are made of glass).

So eilig es dort draußen die Leute zu haben schienen, denn mit ausgestrecktem Arm und gesenktem Kopf, mit spähenden Augen, mit hochgehaltenen Gepäckstücken suchten sie ihren Weg, so versäumte doch kaum einer, einen Blick in die Portierloge zu werfen, denn hinter deren Scheiben waren immer Ankündigungen und Nachrichten ausgehängt, die sowohl für die Gäste als für das Hotelpersonal Wichtigkeit hatten. [192-93]

It can be concluded that the "Ankündigungen und Nachrichten" found behind the glass panes are of major importance for the people outside, who, though preoccupied with movement, seldom fail to observe. The hero now stands apart, he notes their collective characteristics as fearful and apprehensive (with "gesenktem Kopf" and "spähenden Augen"). At the same time he senses danger for himself, now that he is separated from this crowd.

Aber bald hatte Karl auch keine Hoffnung mehr, vom Vestibül aus Hilfe zu bekommen, denn der Oberportier griff an eine Schnur, und über den Scheiben der halben Portierloge zogen sich im Fluge bis in die letzte Höhe schwarze Vorhänge zusammen. [196]

Karl is, at this point, able to view the incomprehensible internal workings of the hotel.

Da waren zum Beispiel sechs Unterportiers bei sechs Telefonen. Die Anordnung war, wie man gleich bemerkte, so getroffen, daß immer einer bloß Gespräche aufnahm, während sein Nachbar nach den vom ersten empfangenen Notizen die Aufträge telephonisch weiterleitete. [197]

Then Karl is physically attacked by the head-porter. In a conversation with his friend Gustav Janouch, Kafka stated, "'Er [man] will durch die

äußere Bindung die innere Freiheit erlangen. Das ist der Sinn des Sich-Unterordnens unter das Gesetz.'" Janouch responded, "'Wer das Gesetz aber nicht erkennt, wie gelangt der zur Freiheit?'" Thereupon Kafka: "'Dem wird das Gesetz durch Schläge bekannt gegeben. Wer es nicht erkennt, der wird zur Erkenntnis geschleift und geprügelt.'" ²⁹

If there is a law, it cannot be effectively communicated, however. The actual depiction of the "information exchange" between the "guests" and the "hotel staff" suggests that there is no real "give and take" to be found in Kafka's depiction of modern reality.

[. . .] zwei Auskunftserteiler hatten [. . .] in der Öffnung des Fensters immer zumindest zehn fragende Gesichter vor sich. Unter diesen zehn Fragern, die immerfort wechselten, war oft ein Durcheinander von Sprachen, als sei jeder einzelne von einem anderen Lande abgesandt. Immer fragten einige gleichzeitig, immer redeten außerdem einzelne untereinander. [193]

Two "Auskunftserteiler" convey information continuously, "ohne die geringste Unterbrechung", which could allow the individual to assess and apply it according to his needs. The blame for the confusion can neither be given fully to the questioners nor to the "Unterportiers"; it is unexplainable. The compulsion behind the activity is invisible; shift changes are signaled by an omnipresent bell. Communication between porter and guest is impersonal. The staff does not recognize individual faces, but rather just stares blankly forwards, as though into a void.

Er [an information-giver] sah weder auf die Tischplatte, wo er fortwährend Handreichungen auszuführen hatte, noch auf das Gesicht dieses oder jenes Fragers, sondern ausschließlich starr vor sich [. . .] [193]

The description of the shift-change for the first time actually deprives the scene of its realistic base, protruding into what could be termed surrealism. ³⁰ (Kafka is certainly not narrating through Karl's eyes here!)

Das Ganze ging so rasch, daß es oft die Leute draußen überraschte und sie aus Schrecken über das so plötzlich vor ihnen auftauchende neue Gesicht fast zurückwichen. Die abgelösten zwei Männer streckten sich und begossen dann über zwei bereitstehenden Waschbecken ihre heißen Köpfe. [195]

Karl's viewing of what might be considered the interplay between "I" (consciousness) and the unknowably complex totality of modern existence (internal and external needs, urges, desires, inhibitions, hopes, problems, etc.) as Kafka viewed it leaves Karl no possibility of uniting the two

spheres. Karl's immediate reaction to what he has seen is characteristic of the blend between despair and light-heartedness found in the novel:

Alles dieses hatte Karl mit der angespanntesten Aufmerksamkeit in wenigen Augenblicken in sich aufgenommen und mit leichten Kopfschmerzen folgte er still dem Oberportier, der ihn weiterführte.
[195]

The importance of social order and officialdom in contrast to private needs was expounded by the uncle (see p. 31 above); it is later pointed out by the night-student (p. 34 above). Here it is stated by the head-porter:

'Natürlich ist dieses hier [the giving of information] die dümmste Arbeit im ganzen Hotel; wenn man eine Stunde zugehört hat, kennt man so ziemlich alle Fragen, die gestellt werden, und den Rest braucht man ja nicht zu beantworten.' [195-96]

The one truly important service--that of establishing communication and giving information--is considered the lowest in the hierarchy of the hotel. Unusual questions are not answered; existence has become so regulated, that not only will no individual "question" be considered, but the information givers themselves have to be "vernagelte Köpfe" (196).

Although not actually based on Karl's point of view as discussed in II.1. above, Kafka's parabolic descriptions are (usually) plausibly derived from and merged with the hero's everyday world.³¹ As Benno von Wiese states, our secular world is at once delineated according to a dual principle, "dem einer grotesken Verfremdung und zugleich einer parabolisch gültigen Wahrheit."³² The confusion Karl observes reflects the paradox of his existential condition, rather than representing a redeeming, infinite realm as aspired to by romantic authors.³³ As Karl views the information exchange, the activity he sees is really a part of the fictional reality, although irreconcilable with it. The mergence of image and world pierces the credibility of a real "transcendental" sphere in the Kantian sense. Each glimpse that Kafka grants the individual into the "truth" of his existence simultaneously shatters the "normal" consciousness which secures a concrete everyday existence. In other words, the classical relationship between truth and experience is seen to be reversed.

Yet the question remains: is the depicted social order viable or not? Kafka returns to a subjective perspective in the seventh chapter, showing, as before, the continuous interplay between the finite consciousness of a 16-year-old and a fictional reality. Lothar Fietz states:

Im auktorial-moralistischen Roman hält der kommentierende und wertende Erzähler neben die subjektive Erlebniswertskala der Hauptgestalt ständig eine objektive Wertskala einer gesellschaftlichen oder religiös gültigen Weltordnung, um daran das individuelle Erlebnis und Verhalten zu relativieren und um es als gut, schlecht, irrig, schuldig, usw. zu bestimmen [. . .]. [34]

In Amerika, however, any evaluative distinction between the hero's subjective view and the social norm is left to the reader's frame of reference. This device is, of course, not unique to Kafka or the early 20th Century; what is unique, however, is the real "ambivalence" and neutrality that the narrator maintains. The labyrinth on the ship; the uncle's house which is almost entirely taken up by business concerns; the endless passageways, empty rooms and darkness at Pollunder's country-house; the confusion and bustle at the hotel; the streets around Brunelda's flat--each housing complex is a poetical description of an inextricable modern world.³⁵ But simultaneously each discloses Karl's own "deficient" thought processes--it is to his eyes they seem so disturbing.³⁶ As an exhausted, jobless, and apathetic Karl walks through the suburbs of Ramses with his enemy Delamarche, Karl sees a forsaken, anonymous, and absurd world.

Auch die Höfe, durch die sie kamen, waren fast gänzlich verlassen. Nur hie und da schob ein Geschäftsdienner einen zweirädrigen Karren vor sich her, eine Frau füllte an der Pumpe eine Kanne mit Wasser, ein Briefträger durchquerte mit ruhigen Schritten den ganzen Hof, ein alter Mann mit weißem Schnauzbart saß mit übergeschlagenen Beinen vor einer Glastür und rauchte eine Pfeife, vor einem Speditionsgeschäft wurden Kisten abgeladen, die unbeschäftigten Pferde drehten gleichmütig die Köpfe, ein Mann in einem Arbeitsmantel überwachte mit einem Papier in der Hand die ganze Arbeit; in einem Büro war das Fenster geöffnet und ein Angestellter, der an seinem Schreibtisch saß, hatte sich von ihm abgewendet und sah nachdenklich hinaus, wo gerade Karl und Delamarche vorübergingen. [216-17]

This is hardly a neutral description. Although Karl considers the courtyards to be "fast gänzlich verlassen", they prove to be bustling with activity! And can horses be "gleichmütig"? The piece of paper in a man's hand appears useless only to one too distant to read it. It is unbeliev-

-ble that the employee seated by a window is looking "nachdenklich", (in despair?) at a piece of ground where Karl and Delamarche "gerade [. . .] vorübergingen", more likely is that he is simply looking at the two men.

II.4. Ambiguity and Language

Since there is no clearly established "reality" in the narrative, the tendency exists, as Martin Walser puts it, "das Beschriebene Ausdruck werden zu lassen"³⁷--i.e. to evaluate descriptions as parts of a general (not Karl's) "Weltbild". Emrich, for example, does not account for the dominating presence of porters in the hotel by suggesting that their importance is exaggerated by Karl (who is directly subordinate to them), but rather grants these figures symbolic value.

Die scheinbar bedeutungsloseste, niedrigste Figur eines öffentlichen Gebäudes, der Portier, wird zur beherrschenden Gestalt, weil alles auf Vermittlung eingestellt ist, niemand mehr unmittelbar einzutreten und sich frei zu behaupten wagt.³⁸

A duplicity of meaning exists in Kafka's prose. As Albert Camus stated,

Tout l'art de Kafka est d'obliger le lecteur à relire. Ses dénouements, ou ses absences de dénouement, suggèrent des explications, mais qui ne sont pas révélées en clair et qui exigent, pour apparaître fondées, que l'histoire soit relue sous un nouvel angle.³⁹

Here we want to show which structural techniques make portions of the text seem equivocal.

Kafka's fictional world lacks individual characteristics. It can hardly be compared to realistic or naturalistic delineations of reality, since he avoids any attempt to communicate an integral, lucid image. Thomas Mann's resort hotel in "Der Tod in Venedig" provides a useful contrast to Kafka's Hotel Occidental.

Er [Gustav Aschenbach] betrat das weitläufige Hotel von hinten, von der Gartenterrasse aus, und begab sich durch die große Halle in die Vorhalle ins Office. [. . .] Ein Manager, ein kleiner, leiser, schmeichelnd höflicher Mann mit schwarzem Schnurrbart und in französisch geschnittenem Gehrock, begleitete ihn im Lift zum zweiten Stockwerk hinauf und wies ihm sein Zimmer an, einen angenehmen, in Kirschholz möblierten Raum, den man mit stark duftenden Blumen ge-

-schmückt hatte und dessen hohe Fenster die Aussicht aufs offene Meer gewährten.⁴⁰

The depiction of Mann's building is a product of "normal" empirical associations. The description is clear and definite; images are presented in a logical progression, and these are delimited so as to avoid abstraction and to promote empathy. Subjective perception and objective facts are easily distinguishable. We know where Aschenbach's room is located, have a conception of its appearance, its quality ("angenehm"), can assume that it faces eastwards, may guess something about the hotel layout, and have a first impression of the manager. The Hotel Occidental, on the other hand, has no specific properties in terms of size, colours, smells, structure, period, furniture, occupants, location, etc. It is sterile. Karl finds a "Saal" upon entering, in which there is a buffet, "das sich an einer Längswand und an den zwei Seitenwänden hinzog" (116). There is a clock "am anderen Ende des Saales" (118). The reader (after two chapters are devoted to Karl's stay in the building!) is left with just the idea of a "hotel", a hotel that has rooms, elevators, which have walls and doors, and guests, porters and waiters, who use the doors, elevators and rooms. There are also "main" and "side" walls and doors. Everyone works and moves quickly. All of this is found in a featureless landscape, somewhere near "Ramses", essentially without any orientation in time and space. We are offered only a functional sketch, no qualitative description.

The vocabulary used to relate Karl's perception of the hotel is neutral and non-descriptive. The nouns "Saal", "Tür", "Wand", and "Zimmer" occur in dozens of passages where more expressive synonyms could replace them. (In just one paragraph Mann uses "Gartenterrasse", "Halle", "Vorhalle", "Office", "Zimmer", and "Raum".) Adjectives are sparse and vague. Those used on page 117 are: "groß" (3), "klein", "viel", "wenig", "frei", "grob", "lang", "plump", and "scherzhaft". Kafka reduces the expressive capacity of language. As Herbert Kraft puts it:

Die konventionelle Sprache hat Beziehungen zwischen Menschen und Dingen in Formeln festgehalten und gibt das Gewesene als Noch-Seiendes aus; Kafkas Hinwendung zum 'neutralen' Ausdruck ist ein Akt

der Verfremdung, durch den das Gewesene als Nicht-mehr-Seiendes kenntlich gemacht wird.⁴¹

Several other passages, however, reveal opposite tendencies than those of simplification and neutralization. The following sentence occurs as Karl finds lodging at night.

- (a) Er [Karl] wurde, seiner Forderung entsprechend,
- (a') vom Wirt mit einem Wink,
- (b) als sei er ein Angestellter,
- (b') die Treppe hinaufgewiesen,
- (c) wo ihn
- (c') ein zerrauftes, altes Frauenzimmer, ärgerlich über den gestörten Schlaf, empfing und,
- (d) fast ohne ihn anzuhören,
- (d') mit ununterbrochenen Ermahnungen, leise aufzutreten,
- (e) in ein Zimmer führte,
- (e') dessen Tür sie,
- (f) nicht ohne ihn vorher mit einem Pst! angehaucht zu haben,
- (f') schloß. [99]

Here we find an extraordinary precision, the attempt to note all relevant details. In this one sentence a precise alternation between actions relating to Karl (a, b, etc.) and all others (a', b', etc.) occurs eleven times! Little has taken place, but syntactic structures are strained to their limits. The vocabulary referring to the action (although not to the building) is descriptive. But this is no survey made by a detached narrator. Subjective and objective narrating seem mixed; Karl perceives a totality, but in a manner that shuns comprehension.⁴² Often Kafka attempts to define an object or a condition--or qualify a given statement--with exaggerations (a; see below), with contradictions (b), with inexpressable distinctions (c), and with perspective interjections (d):

- (a) Immer wieder hörte man an den verschiedensten Stellen Flüche und Fäuste, die auf den Tisch schlugen. [116; my underlinings]
[. . .] war im Schlafsaal immerfort die größte Bewegung [. . .] . [145]
- (b) [. . .] ein eitler Junge mit [. . .] glatten, etwas gehöhlten Wangen. [143]
[. . .] rief er erfreut und streng zugleich [. . .] . [206]
- (c) [. . .] erzeugte in dem Zimmer fast Dunkelheit [. . .] . [25]

[. . .] nicht allzuweit über den Köpfen der Fahrenden. [109]

Karl lag fast in seinen Armen [. . .] . [215]

[. . .] immer wieder setzte sich an eine Treppe eine neue in nur unmerklich veränderter Richtung an. Einmal blieb Karl sogar stehen, nicht eigentlich vor Müdigkeit, aber vor Wehrlosigkeit gegenüber dieser Treppenlänge. [217]

Brunelda stand [. . .] in ihrer ganzen Breite [. . .] . [253]

- (d) [. . .] nur einmal rollte ein Stein den Abhang herab, vielleicht durch Zufall, vielleicht in einem verfehlten Wurf. [129]

Es mußte wohl eine entlegene Vorstadtstraße sein [. . .] . [204]

[. . .] so schien es doch ganz aussichtslos. [220]

The cause and effect of the above methodologies has been noted by Fritz Martini:

Sein [Kafka's] Wille zur Genauigkeit [. . .] trifft auf das Ungenaue, Ungesicherte und macht es so erst in seiner quälenden Unausweichbarkeit bemerkbar. Indem er, die Grenzen so scharf wie möglich zieht, wird das Ungrenzbare sichtbar.⁴³

Kafka reverses the normal function of language from giving information to creating confusion. This is accomplished with a combination of extreme ambiguity and extreme precision.⁴⁴ As shown above, the traditionally more important "whole" (e.g. the hotel) remains nebulous, while minor parts (e.g. going to a room) are paradoxically described in detail. The fundamental principle involved is that of contrast (or antithesis). Its effect is alienation: through sentence structure and vocabulary the matter is freed from evaluation, and the reader from standard linguistical associations.

Attempts to describe and consolidate certain phenomena with language lead to what Jörg Thalmann terms "enigmatic comparisons" or Jörgen Kobs terms "deformed metaphors".⁴⁵

[. . .] als werde über dieser Straße eine alles bedeckende Glasscheibe jeden Augenblick immer wieder mit aller Kraft zerschlagen. [45]

[. . .] alle Augenblicke die Richtung wechselnd, wie in einem Wirbelwind der Lärm jagte, nicht wie von Menschen verursacht, sondern wie ein fremdes Element [. . .] . [58]

Es schien als müsse unbedingt ein Unglück geschehen, aber gleich nahm der alles umfassende Verkehr auch die schnurgerade Fahrt dieses Automobils ruhig in sich auf. [203]

Thalmann makes the interesting observation that the novel's characteristically irregular language suddenly becomes flowing and protracted whenever Karl's thoughts are directed at the past or future, in other words when the complexity of the immediate situation can be forgotten in favour of memories, hopes, wishes, or plans.⁴⁶ In the ship's offices Karl remembers his European home (35-36), at Pollunder's he speculates about seeing the uncle again (67-68), and at Brunelda's he speculates about acquiring a position (263-64). These passages seem prosaic and illusionary--just as Theresa's account of her mother's death (149-54)--in contrast to the remainder of the novel.

Because the informative element of every statement is inherently invalidated with the techniques described above (not to mention the use of irony and the limited perspective discussed in II.1. above), everything, all correspondence between consciousness and "world", is neutralized, questionable and therefore insecure. The tendency towards neutralization is termed "Aufhebung" by Martin Walser and Christoph Bezzel, and "Reduktion" by Klaus Ramm.⁴⁷ Max Bense writes in this context:

Kafka notiert letztlich keine Seiendes feststellenden Sätze. In diesem Sinne verfolgt seine Prosa eine merkwürdige Technik der 'Entstellung' und 'Verhüllung', wenn man sie an der klassischen Prosa der 'Feststellung' und 'Klärung' spiegelt. [. . .] Das Selbstsein ist [. . .] nie das psychologische, empirische Ich.⁴⁸

Ulrich Fülleborn concludes in a variation on Bense's theory:

Die 'geistige Welt' ist bei Kafka [. . .] als die eine, universale Wirklichkeit zu verstehen, neben der das auf die psychologische Perspektive reduzierte Ich unwirklich wird. Bietet sie Halt und Geborgenheit, vermag sie scheinbar Besitz zu werden, so ist der Geist in ihr noch nicht zur Freiheit gelangt.⁴⁹

II.5. The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma

As was the case at the Hotel Occidental, Karl is, in the last chapter, confronted with the absolute at a moment of social rejection and deprivation.⁵⁰ He is still jobless and poor. The Oklahoma theatre's advertisement (265) is largely ignored by the public; it contains no mention of payment. The aesthetic and practical spheres remain polarized. The concept "Künstler werden" (265) is adorned with the unbelievable language

of a religious ultimatum.

Das große Theater von Oklahoma ruft euch! Es ruft nur heute, nur einmal! Wer jetzt die Gelegenheit versäumt, versäumt sie für immer! Wer an seine Zukunft denkt, gehört zu uns. [265]

The placard also states that everyone is welcome, "Jeder, also auch Karl." (265) He has nothing to lose.

The superficially farcical, perverted quality of the theatre's aesthetic offering is suggested once again as Karl ascends from the subway station in Clayton.

Als er in Clayton ausstieg, hörte er gleich den Lärm vieler Trompeten. Es war ein wirrer Lärm, die Trompeten waren nicht gegeneinander abgestimmt, es wurde rücksichtslos geblasen. [. . .] Vor dem Eingang zum Rennplatz war ein langes, niedriges Podium aufgebaut, auf dem Hunderte von Frauen, als Engel gekleidet, in weißen Tüchern mit großen Flügeln am Rücken, auf langen, goldglänzenden Trompeten bliesen. [266-67]

Every two hours the women are relieved by men dressed as devils, of which one half blows and the other half drums. The theatre is ambivalent in value. Situated outside of convention, it demands the uncompromising, complete attention of its members; and, as Günter Wöllner points out, there is no longer a basic antagonism between good and bad (heaven and hell). Both realms are situated on earth and have become confused and interchangeable.⁵¹

Once behind the theatre's facade, Karl encounters a situation that bears little resemblance to the social reality found in the first seven chapters of the novel. As he blows Fanny's horn (268), Karl halts the other players by making his own music, but finds approval rather than admonishment. Unlike the hotel employees, the theatre officials make every effort to indulge individual needs, differences, desires, etc. There are over two hundred "reception booths", all clearly designated to accommodate specific capabilities: "engineers", "people with technical knowledge", "European secondary-school pupils", etc. These booths are each staffed by two officials, a director and a clerk, but they are not the selfless doubles found behind the hotel's information desk. A clerk is able to ignore his superior's mistrust of Karl's pretended name "Negro" and himself accept

Karl into the theatre. ("Im Konflikt zwischen Kanzleileiter und Schreiber wird ein echter Konflikt zwischen 'Gewissen' und tieferem seelischen Wissen ausgetragen und zugunsten des tieferen Wissens entschieden." --Wilhelm Emrich⁵²) Karl is welcomed by the theatre's leader, not just by anonymous, lower-order functionaries. The leader's questions concern Karl's essential being and situation--

'Wo waren Sie zuletzt angestellt?' [. . .] 'Waren Sie dort zufrieden?'
[. . .] 'Zu welchem Posten fühlen Sie sich geeignet?' [279-80]

--not alleged psychological justifications and motivations. In this sense the theatre is a "nature" theatre. Although Karl remains the calculating, helpless entity that he had been throughout the novel, the leader sees through Karl's fabricated replies ("Das wissen wir" [. . .] 'Das ist richtig'), forcing Karl to finally recognize his actual (human) condition.

'Nein!', sagte Karl [. . .], 'ich weiß nicht, ob ich zum Theaterspielen geeignet bin. Ich will mich aber anstrengen und alle Aufträge auszuführen suchen.'

Der Herr wandte sich dem Leiter zu, beide nickten, Karl schien richtig geantwortet zu haben [. . .] . [280]

The theatre's guidelines are not based on a practical, goal-oriented philosophy, which would subjugate the individual into a formless mechanism, whether it be the uncle's dominant role or Robinson's subordinate one. In response to Karl's statement that he had always wanted to become an engineer, the leader takes serious what Karl himself considers ludicrous, thereby responding to the hero's actual needs.

Aber der Herr nahm es ernst, wie er alles ernst nahm. 'Nun, Ingenieur', sagte er, 'können Sie wohl nicht gleich werden, vielleicht würde es Ihnen aber vorläufig entsprechen, irgendwelche niedrigere technische Arbeiten auszuführen.' [281]

A reversal takes place with the final chapter. The structure of the theatre represents a unification of the poles that delineated Karl's existential struggle: rationality and emotions, technology and inner being, discipline and individuality.⁵³ This conception in no way denotes a return to a simple subjective freedom, a sort of "antithesis" to America. The utopian character of Kafka's "solution" is founded directly on this point: Karl finds "Beruf, Freiheit, Rückhalt"⁵⁴ because subjective "free-play" and organizational necessity are united as "theatre".

The transformation is clearly an external one, but can not be understood in terms of a concrete artistic, religious, or social program, despite certain indicative elements, the trumpet-blowing angels and devils, or as Gerhard Loose phrases it, that

--im Gegensatz zur kapitalistischen Gesellschaft--die materielle Frage nur darin zu bestehen scheint, die einfachen, fundamentalen Bedürfnisse zu befriedigen.⁵⁵

Karl becomes a "technical worker", not an actor. The "theatre" is just as ambiguous as Kafka's other images. Kafka once told Janouch:

'Ich zeichnete keine Menschen. Ich erzählte eine Geschichte. Das sind Bilder, nur Bilder. [. . .] Man photographiert Dinge, um sie aus dem Sinn zu verscheuchen. Meine Geschichten sind eine Art von Augenschließen.'⁵⁶

Kafka does not attempt a description of the theatre in Oklahoma--the narrative breaks off as Karl's train is passing through a mountain range:

[. . .] breite Bergströme kamen, als große Wellen auf dem hügeligen Untergrund eilend und in sich tausend kleine Schaumwellen treibend, sie stürzten sich unter Brücken, über die der Zug fuhr, und sie waren so nah, daß der Hauch ihrer Kühle das Gesicht erschauern machte. [288]

Wöllner's interpretation of this passage is consistent with our conclusions:

Das Elementare, Bedrohliche des Gebirges, das sie durchfahren, steht sinnbildlich für die mit Gefahren verbundene Überwindung des Empirisch-Diesseitigen.⁵⁷

Kafka does, however, grant Karl a glimpse at a photograph of the Oklahoma theatre. What Karl sees surpasses logical conception. The proportions are insurveyable, the quality of the light is inexpressible.

Beim ersten Anblick konnte man denken, es sei nicht eine Loge, sondern die Bühne, so weit geschwungen ragte die Brüstung in den freien Raum. [. . .] weißes und doch mildes Licht enthüllte förmlich den Vordergrund der Loge, während ihre Tiefe hinter rotem, unter vielen Tönungen sich faltendem Samt, der an der ganzen Umrandung niederfiel und durch Schnüre gelenkt wurde, als eine dunkle, rötliche schimmernde Leere erschien. [284]

Kafka aptly notes, "Man konnte sich in dieser Loge kaum Menschen vorstellen [. . .]." (284) Karl Rossmann's struggle can have no conclusion, just as the novel has no proper ending.

Notes

1. Quotes are from Volume II of the collected works edited by Max Brod: Franz Kafka, Amerika (New York: Schocken Books, 1946).
2. As was first noted by Friedrich Beißner in Der Erzähler Franz Kafka, Ein Vortrag (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1952).
3. See Jörgen Kobs, Kafka, Untersuchungen zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten (Bad Homburg: Athenäum Verlag, 1970), pp. 25-55 and 123-327.
4. Karl is happy that the stoker is German, frightened because Robinson is Irish, and elated because the head-cook at the hotel is German.
5. Compare "Beschreibung eines Kampfes", especially footnotes twelve and sixteen on page 18.
6. Martin Walser, Beschreibung einer Form, Versuch über Franz Kafka (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1961), p. 72.
7. Barbara Beutner, Die Bildsprache Franz Kafkas (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1973), p. 155.
8. Compare Jörg Thalmann, Wege zu Kafka, Eine Interpretation des Amerikaromans, p. 155.
9. Hans Reiss, Franz Kafka, Eine Betrachtung seines Werkes (Heidelberg: Schneider Verlag, 1952), pp. 157-58.
See also Herbert Kraft, Kafka: Wirklichkeit und Perspektive (Bebenhausen: Rotsch Verlag, 1972), p.35. Kraft writes of a "[. . .] Komik der Unangemessenheit des Denkens und Handelns der Perspektivgestalt [. . .]."
10. See Winifried Kudzus, "Erzählhaltung und Zeitverschiebung in Kafkas Prozeß und Schloß", DVLG, 38 (1964), pp. 193 and 205.
11. Gerhart von Graevenitz, Die Setzung des Subjekts (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1973), p. 49.
12. See Klaus-Peter Philippi, Reflexion und Wirklichkeit, Untersuchungen zu Kafkas Roman Das Schloß (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1966), p. 30.
See also Herbert Kraft, p. 12.
13. Martin Walser, p. 49.
14. Ibid, p. 38.
15. Jörgen Kobs, p. 543.
16. Heinz Hillmann, Franz Kafka, Dichtungstheorie und Dichtungsgestalt (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1973), p. 175.
17. Compare James Rolleston, Kafka's Narrative Theater, p. 30.
18. Compare Walter Sokel, Franz Kafka, Tragik und Ironie, p. 311.
19. Hermann Pongs, Franz Kafka, Dichter des Labyrinths (Heidelberg: Rothe Verlag, 1960), p. 18.

20. Patrick Bridgwater uses the concepts "Apolline" and "Dionysian" in the context of two opposed domains in Amerika, but does not elaborate. His efforts to link the novel with specific religious and philosophical doctrines are valuable, but leave much unexplained: "The main sources of Der Verschollene are the Old Testament and Schopenhauer; Der Prozeß is based on Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, while Das Schloß is most indebted to Nietzsche." Kafka and Nietzsche (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1974), pp. 62-63.
21. Compare Eberhard Lämmert, Bauformen des Erzählens (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1955/1967), p. 195:

"Letzten Endes kommt es nur auf die Feinfühligkeit des Beobachters an, um an jedem Punkt des fortschreitenden Erzählens die mitschwingenden Gehalte aus der näheren und fernerer Umgebung aufzudecken." Kafka's narrating provides the extreme example of this rule.
22. Compare Jörg Thalmann, pp. 146-49.
23. Heinz Politzer, Franz Kafka, der Künstler (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 1965), pp. 225-26.
24. Christoph Bezzel, Natur bei Kafka, Studien zur Ästhetik des poetischen Zeichens, p. 59.
25. See Max Bense, Die Theorie Kafkas (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1952), p. 73.

See also Martin Walser, p. 86 and Heinz Hillmann, pp. 152-53.
26. Compare Heinz Hillmann, p. 150.
27. Jörgen Kobs, pp. 152-55.
28. See Herbert Kraft, p. 30 and Jörgen Kobs, pp. 34-40.
29. Gustav Janouch, Gespräche mit Kafka (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 1951), pp. 100-01.
30. "Surrealistic" because real and fantastic elements are blended together, although, to be sure, not through an unreflected juxtaposition of subconsciously derived representations. See:

Wilhelm Emrich, "Die Bilderwelt Franz Kafkas", in Protest und Verheißung, Studien zur klassischen und modernen Dichtung (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum Verlag, 1962), p. 180.
31. In "Die Verwandlung", for example, the hero is literally transformed into an animal. See:

Ulrich Fülleborn, "Zum Verhältnis von Perspektivismus und Parabolik in der Dichtung Kafkas", in Wissenschaft als Dialog: Festschrift für Wolfdietrich Rasch (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1969), p. 204.
32. Benno von Wiese, "Franz Kafka, ein Hungerkünstler", in Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka (Düsseldorf: Bagel Verlag, 1962), p. 331.
33. See Günter Wöllner, E.T.A. Hoffmann und Franz Kafka, Von der 'fortgeführten Metapher' zum 'sinnlichen Paradox' (Bern and Stuttgart: Haupt Verlag, 1971), especially p. 109.

34. Lothar Fietz, "Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Deutung von Kafkas Schloß-Roman", DVLG, 37 (1963), p. 75.
35. As argued by Wilhelm Emrich and Walter Sokel; see also:
Gerhard Loose, Franz Kafka und Amerika (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann Verlag, 1968).
36. The complementary view is defended by Jörgen Kobs and Jörg Thalmann, as well as by:
Hartmut Binder, Motiv und Gestaltung bei Franz Kafka (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1966).
37. Martin Walser, p. 24.
38. Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka, p. 238.
39. Albert Camus, "L'Espoir et l'Absurde dans l'Oeuvre de Franz Kafka", in Essais, edited by R. Quillot and L. Faucon (Bruges: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 201.
40. Thomas Mann, Der Tod in Venedig (Frankfurt a. M. and Hamburg: Fischer Bücherei, 1958), p. 24.
41. Herbert Kraft, p. 20. See also Jörgen Kobs, pp. 101-08.
42. Compare Christoph Bezzel, pp. 45-46.
43. Fritz Martini, "Franz Kafka, Das Schloß" in Das Wagnis der Sprache (Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1954), p. 303.
44. Ibid, p. 314.
45. Jörg Thalmann, p. 90 and Jörgen Kobs, p. 110.
46. See Jörg Thalmann, p. 90.
47. Martin Walser, p. 93 and Christoph Bezzel, pp. 42-43;
Klaus Ramm, Reduktion als Erzählprinzip bei Kafka (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum Verlag, 1971).
48. Max Bense, pp. 90-91.
49. Ulrich Fülleborn, p. 311.
50. See Günter Wöllner, p. 109.
51. Ibid, pp. 104-05.
52. Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka, p. 255.
53. Compare Walter Sokel, p. 329.
54. See Max Brod's Afterword in Amerika, p. 311: "Mit rätselhaften Worten deutete Kafka lächelnd an, daß sein junger Held in diesem 'fast grenzenlosen' Theater Beruf, Freiheit, Rückhalt, ja sogar die Heimat und die Eltern wie durch paradiesischen Zauber wiederfinden werde."
55. See Gerhard Loose, p. 63.
56. Gustav Janouch, p. 25.
57. Günter Wöllner, p. 94.

III. Jakob von Gunten

Robert Walser's third and last Berlin novel¹ is composed as a diary. Its seventy-eight undated entries are made by a fictitious Jakob von Gunten during his enrolment at the Institute Benjamenta, a servants school located somewhere in a back court of an unspecified large city. The diary is primarily a vehicle for the formation and articulation of the hero's ideas, experiences and fantasies--not for the representation of a tangible "objective" fictional reality. The (outer) plot is thus easily sketched.

Jakob arrives at the school after leaving his parents' home and is arrogantly received by Benjamenta, its director. The school seems to distinguish itself through the suppression of thought and development, by isolating itself from the external world. Jakob is fascinated by some mysterious inner chambers, intrigued by the big city and his brother Johann von Gunten's social circle, and impressed by the school's exemplary pupil Kraus. Jakob progressively withdraws into the confines of the school and becomes preoccupied with his own internal transformations, recording at the same time the final stages of the institute's desintegration. The school's only teacher, Lisa Benjamenta, dies and the remaining pupils are supplied jobs. Jakob himself seems to play an influential role in the dissolution of the school; the friendship that develops between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta climaxes with their enigmatic departure from the school (and European culture), marked by Jakob's decision to give up writing.

As Karl Rossmann, Jakob faces a problem of consciousness; he has to reconcile his fluctuating and apparently conflicting perceptions of the world, the institute, the Benjamentas and Kraus with one another.

III.1. The Perspective of the Narrator

The diary, as stated, is Jakob's medium for a process of self-clarification, a "Selbstvergewisserungsprozeß", as Dierk Rodewald puts it.² Walser is not the "all-knowing" narrator; he introduces an "I". The per-

spective of Walser's fictional author is all-pervading. Everything narrated proves to be an expression of Jakob's changing attitudes.

Kraus, for example, is an important figure, to whom Jakob devotes more space than to any other figure. After a few days in the school, Jakob corrects his first, negative impression of Kraus:

[. . .] damals hielt ich ihn einfach für einen Affen, während ich ihn heute, um des rein persönlichen Wesens willen, hoch schätze.
[339]

Thereafter:

Von Kraus werde ich viel reden müssen. [. . .] Nichts kann mich so tief aufregen wie der Anblick und der Geruch des Guten und Recht-schaffenen. [353]

Kraus wird später im Leben, wohin er auch kommen wird, immer als brauchbarer, aber als ungebildeter Mensch angesehen werden, für mich aber ist gerade er durchaus gebildet, und zwar hauptsächlich deshalb, weil er ein festes, gutes Ganzes darstellt. [407]

Kraus ist ein Bild rechtlichen, ganz, ganz eintönigen, einsilbigen und eindeutigen Wesens. [410]

The concept of service is one of the novel's most important motifs and it is this pure, unreflective form of existence that Kraus represents. "Kraus ist ein echtes Gott-Werk, ein Nichts, ein Diener." (409) He has no humour, no fantasy, no self-respect, and consequently no urge to develop himself.

Man spürt es sofort, wenn Menschen Erfolge und Anerkennung aufzuweisen haben, sie werden quasi dick von sättigender Selbstzufriedenheit, und ballonhaft bläst sie die Kraft der Eitelkeit auf, zum Niederwiedererkennen. [410]

Und blicke ich dann Kraus an, dann erfaßt mich ein tiefes, murmelndes, quellenhaftes, wundervolles Behagen. [413]

After Kraus has left the school to take a position, Jakob writes:

Kraus ist gegangen. Ein Licht, eine Sonne ist geschwunden. Mir ist es, als wenn es von jetzt ab in der Welt nur noch Abend sein könnte.
[481]

Mit Kraus ist die Hälfte des Lebens gegangen. [483]

Yet whenever Jakob considers Kraus' way of life in terms of a real existential possibility for himself, the entries are full of doubt. The ideal servant often appears to acquire the narrowness and dullness of an ascete:

[. . .] Kraus lernt auswendig, indem er Lektionen vor sich hinmurmelt. Eine Grabesstille herrscht überall. Der Hof liegt verlassen da wie eine viereckige Ewigkeit, und ich stehe meist aufrecht und übe mich, auf einem Bein zu stehen. Oft halte ich zur Abwechslung den Atem lang an. [399]

Wie schlecht das ist, Kraus immer äffen und ärgern zu wollen. Und doch: wie reizend. Seine Vorwürfe klingen so lustig. [415]

During the comparison of Kraus to "Joseph in Egypt", Jakob also revels in irony, an indication of increasing distance.

Ja, Kraus könnte so gut Joseph sein wie nur irgend etwas. Haltung, Gestalt, Gesicht, Frisur und Gebärde passen unvergleichlich. Sogar seine leider Gottes immer noch nicht geheilte Hautauszeichnung. Pickel sind etwas Biblisches, Orientalisches. Und die Moral, der Charakter, der feste Besitz keuscher Jünglingstugenden? Wundervoll paßt das. Joseph in Ägypten muß auch ein kleiner, sattelfester Pendant gewesen sein, sonst würde er der lüsternen Frau gehorcht und seinem Herrn die Treue gebrochen haben. [407]

Jakob also works with a dual standard when analyzing the city. At first his description mirrors the incomprehensibility and chaos of the scene, all in contrast to the organic unity of life and environment at his parents' home. The way society is portrayed as a collective force condemns it as inimical to existence.

Welch ein Geschiebe und Gedränge, welch ein Rasseln und Prasseln. Welch ein Geschrei, Gestampf, Gesurr und Gesumme. Und alles so eng zusammengepfercht. [. . .] In die vorhandenen Mengen schieben sich ganz neue, und es geht, kommt, erscheint und verläuft sich in einem fort. [365-66]

Jakob regards the activity as unnatural and absurd.

Die Wagen der elektrischen Trambahn sehen wie figurenvollgepfropfte Schachteln aus. Die Omnibusse humpeln wie große, ungeschlachte Käfer vorüber. [365]

[. . .] die Natur fehlt hier. [. . .] Die Bäume der Anlage sind ganz farblos. Die Blätter hängen unnatürlich bleiern herunter. Es ist, als wenn hier alles aus Blech und dünnen Eisen sei. [349]

Just as nature appears barren and dead to him, he perceives only parts of the people around him, who consequently appear grotesque and unreal.³

Brüste prallen einem entgegen, in Kleidern und Fassonen eingepreßte, weibliche Brüste. Und dann sind wieder die dummen vielen Zigarren in den vielen Schlitzten von männlichen Mundteilen. [366]

Such perceptions of human beings as sex organs, just as his failure to find an order or a humane element in the confusion, lead Jakob to consider

the question of individual worth: "Was ist man eigentlich in dieser Flut, in diesem bunten, nicht endenwollenden Strom von Menschen?" (366) Jakob judges (with a reference to himself) the quality of life in mass society negatively:

Dann gehen alle diese Figuren, und ich selber mit, wie Traumfiguren rasch unter dem trüben Flor dahin, etwas suchend, und wie es scheint, fast nie etwas Schönes und Rechtes findend. Es sucht hier alles, alles sehnt sich nach Reichtümern und fabelhaften Glücksgütern. Hastig geht man. Nein, sie beherrschen sich alle, aber die Hast, das Sehnen, die Qual und die Unruhe glänzen schimmernd zu den begehrlchen Augen heraus. [366-67]

Jakob's second and suddenly positive conception of the city differs radically from the former, severely critical view. The latter entry reads in part:

Die Großstadt erzieht, sie bildet, und zwar durch Beispiele, nicht durch trockene, den Büchern entnommene Lehrsätze. [. . .] Und dann ist hier noch so vieles, was fördert, hält und hilft. Man kann es kaum sagen. Wie schwer ist es, Feinem und Gutem lebendigen Ausdruck zu geben. Man ist hier dem bescheidenen Leben schon dankbar, man dankt immer ein wenig, indem es einen treibt, indem man es eilig hat. [. . .] Und dann das Traumhafte, das Malerische und Dichterische! Menschen eilen und wirken immer an einem vorbei. [. . .] Ja, das alles erscheint mir gut und groß. Man gewinnt, indem man mitten im Gestrudel und Gesprudel ist. [374-75]

In this so-called positive draft, Jakob regards the same scene, expressing the conviction that symptoms of social dissolution are good, resorting to the same descriptive language of a pure selfless (volition-critical) state that he later applies to Kraus.

Jakob's statements would so often appear to be both ironic and serious because the significance of certain phenomena--Kraus and the city, for example--is ambivalent. Nothing in the novel possesses constant form or value. Jakob's characterizations express more about himself than about the other persons. Jakob seems to tease the reader as he does not take a firm stand or even draw concrete parallels to himself, but simply jots down entries. These are a disordered, although not chaotic, composition of memories, predictions, character analyses, self-reflections, associations, dreams, fantasies, dialogues, interpretations, etc., some revealing a perceptive literary intellect and others disclosing the naive intuition of a child.

As Felix Strebelt states,

[...] das ironische Wort [expresses] nur eine Möglichkeit, wie man 'es' sagen könnte [and does not intend] das Wort mit dem 'wahren' Sachverhalt übereinstimmen zu lassen oder mit dem Wort einen 'wahren' Sachverhalt zu symbolisieren. Das ironische Wort verschleiern und überspielt--auch in der verdeutlichenden Drastik--diesen vielmehr, das heißt, das präzise Gemeinte bleibt hinter der maskenhaften Mehrdeutigkeit als 'wahres Gesicht' verborgen.⁴

Jakob's "Lebenslauf" (378-80) typifies his ironic reversal of a conventional exposition and his hesitancy to make any concrete statements about his own person.

Unterzeichneter, Jakob von Gunten, Sohn rechtschaffener Eltern, den und den Tag geboren, da und da aufgewachsen, ist als Eleve in das Institut Benjamenta eingetreten, um sich die paar Kenntnisse anzueignen, die nötig sind, in irgend jemandes Dienste zu treten. [...] [378-79]

That Walser chose the diary form for this novel has several interesting reasons.⁵ Diaries have certain subjective properties. They record events and inner processes, as they are filtered through the writer's consciousness (or pretending to be so), without intending communication. Spontaneity, inconclusive notations, fragmentary descriptions, and personal references are general characteristics. There is not a need for schematic or stylistic unity, nor for a comprehensive or accurate portrayal.

The time-structure represents a related aspect of the anti-intellectual tendencies in the novel. The diary is not only undated, but Jakob is apathetic concerning birthdates, seasons, or any measurable relationship to the past and future.⁶ The narrative techniques of acceleration and retardation render the present moment precarious.⁷ As foreshadowing and anticipation are to be classified Jakob's constant speculation about the future, and the dreams and fantasies about various possible roles in life. The retarding elements are mainly the memories, non-committal descriptions, negations, and irony, which continually have yet to be modified and incorporated into a viable form. The focal point of the narrative is progressively shifted into the future. During the earlier entries Jakob often maintains a reference to the extant moment by implicitly referring to

the journal or the room he is sitting in. These entries concur as normal pauses in the writing of his diary. The latter portions of the novel contain a diminishing amount of reflective-analytic prose, and more summaries of dialogues and dreams, which help anticipate the subsequent conclusion. The concluding remarks of the middle and latter parts almost invariably stress the impossibility of a descriptive statement or perspective fixation, thereby emphasizing the conditional nature of Jakob's "present", non-prolific, reflective life.

Nette Träumereien sind das! [405]

Ich muß aufhören, heute, mit Schreiben. [411]

Da schweige ich lieber. [413]

Welch ein Geschwätz. [418]

Fort mit den Gedanken. [423]

Jakob appears to progressively realize his dilemma, but refuses to draw conclusions. As the (fictional) author, he is never completely in the position to transcend and survey his own intellectual development. The reader must detect the basic directions and ascertain the fundamental conflicts in Jakob's thinking, as well as in the structure of the novel. Being forced to respond critically to certain paradoxical elements in the text proper and to think beyond the consequential predicament at the diary's close, the "educated" reader is removed from the narrative, alienated from the hero's problematic decisions and mentality, and placed in a judgemental position.⁸

III.2. Jakob's Struggle

Jakob's shifting attitude towards Kraus and the city is comparable to the dubious attitude (half-serious, half-ironic) he develops towards the school and its ideals--as well as to his own self.

The institute, which is the locale of Jakob's experimental reformation of self, appears to be secluded from society. It is essentially self-contained and is never even remotely fixated in time and space, thus losing any connection to the city (for the reader). The court-garden is over-

-grown and out-of-bounds. In terms of comfort and appearance the school is poor: furnishings are scarce, windows small and the facade hardly pretentious. The pupils are reared to be small and subordinate. There is only one class, which deals solely with the pupils' behaviour (337). The course consists of two parts, a "theoretical" and a "practical" (390). The former implies primarily memorization of rules, the latter specific formula for conduct. All is based on the ideal of insignificance, of striving without hope or goal. The strict, seemingly stupid preparations and formalities negate abstract (integrative) thought and reflection in favour of simple discipline. Fantasy and humour are forbidden (431-33). The attention devoted to single body parts--eyes, nose, ears, mouth, hair (383-85)--in the institutional rules grants autonomy to the being, which would ordinarily be united under a conceptual thought or idea.

Jakob is intrigued by the school from the beginning of his enrolment in it.

Man lernt hier sehr wenig, es fehlt an Lehrkräften, und wir Knaben vom Institut Benjamenta werden es zu nichts bringen, das heißt, wir werden alle etwas sehr Kleines und Untergeordnetes im späteren Leben sein. Der Unterricht, den wir genießen, besteht hauptsächlich darin, uns Geduld und Gehorsam einzuprägen, zwei Eigenschaften, die wenig oder gar keinen Erfolg versprechen. Innere Erfolge, ja. Doch was hat man von solchen? [335]

Jakob is here ironically applying a "realistic", conventional view of the educational plan ("was hat man von solchen?"). Jakob's subsequent appeal to be dismissed from the school (probably more a provocation than consequence of a resolution) obtains the following reply from the headmaster:

'Was deine törichte Meinung betrifft, du könntest hier nichts lernen, so irrst du dich, denn du kannst lernen. Lerne vor allen Dingen erst deine Umgebung kennen. Deine Kameraden sind es wert, daß man wenigstens den Versuch macht, sich mit ihnen bekannt zu machen. Sprich mit ihnen. Ich rate dir, sei ruhig. Hübsch ruhig.' [347]

Jakob follows Benjamenta's advice and soon obtains a positive valuation of the school's pedagogics:

Wenig lernen! Immer wieder dasselbe! Nach und nach fange auch ich an, zu begreifen, was für eine große Welt hinter diesen Worten verborgen ist. Etwas sich in der Tat fest, fest einzuprägen, für immer! [391]

The claim laid by the institute to a total subjugation of the self allows

Jakob to postulate a new aesthetic. The affinity that Jakob has for an inner-spiritual sphere is already evident in several early entries and may help to explain his attraction to the school.

Das Gute, Reine und Hohe irgend, irgendwo versteckt in Nebeln zu wissen und es leise, ganz ganz still zu verehren und anzubeten, mit gleichsam total kühler und schattenhafter Inbrunst: daran bin ich gewöhnt. [369]

The school's absolute internal reference, as Jakob conceives it, could perhaps be represented by the ineffable "inner garden" referred to in its textbook (411). Jakob writes in this context:

Vielleicht sind wir heiter und sorgenlos aus Beschränktheit. [. . .] Aber ist deshalb die Heiterkeit und Frische unserer Herzen weniger wert? [. . .] Unbewußt oder bewußt nehmen wir auf vieles ein wenig Bedacht, sind da und dort mit den Geistern, und die Empfindungen schicken wir nach allen möglichen Windrichtungen aus, Erfahrungen und Beobachtungen einsammelnd. [. . .] Wer sich selber schätzt, ist vor Entmutigungen und Herabwürdigungen nie sicher, denn stets begegnet dem selbstbewußten Menschen etwas Bewußtseinsfeindliches. Und doch sind wir Schüler durchaus nicht ohne Würde; aber es ist eine sehr, sehr bewegungsfähige, kleine, biege- und schmiegsame Würde. [420-21]

The nature of this ideal, of the "Frische" and "Würde", is difficult to formulate. George Avery aptly states that the "non-intellectual character of the school's law makes it impossible for Jakob to articulate it."⁹ Jochen Greven paraphrases the aspired "garden" as "reines Sein", "das Universal-Menschliche", "das unreflektierte, rein physische Dasein", and "unbedingtes Sein".¹⁰

Jakob's affirmation of the school is coupled with an impetuous criticism of consciousness, whose predicament Jakob again and again tries to grasp and articulate. Increasingly in the latter portions of the book the problem of consciousness is voiced in the longing for an absolute liberation from the finite oscillations and dependencies of (volitional) being:

Ein Schlag wird mich eines Tages treffen, so ein recht vernichtender Schlag, und dann werden alle diese Wirrnisse, diese Sehnsucht, diese Unkenntnis, dies alles, diese Dank- und Undankbarkeit, diese Lügen und Selbstbetrüge, dies Wissen-Meinen und dieses Doch-nie-etwas-Wissen zu Ende sein. [425]

Ich respektiere ja mein Ich gar nicht, ich sehe es bloß, und es läßt mich ganz kalt. O in Wärme kommen! Wie herrlich! Ich werde immer in Wärme kommen können, denn mich wird niemals etwas Persönliches,

Selbstisches am Warmwerden, am Entflammen und am Teilnehmen verhindern. Wie glücklich ich bin, daß ich in mir nichts Achtens- und Sehenswertes zu erblicken vermag! Klein sein und bleiben. [. . .] Ich kann nur in den unteren Regionen atmen. [472-73]

But, although Jakob is strongly attracted to the school's ideal, he never fully accepts the school and fails to become like Kraus. As the reflective author of the diary, he maintains a "sense of reality"; hence the irony.

Zehntausende von Köpfen arbeiten in der Welt überflüssig. [. . .] Der Lebensmut geht den Menschengeschlechtern verloren mit all dem Abhandeln und Erfassen und Wissen. Wenn zum Beispiel ein Zögling des Institutes Benjamenta nicht weiß, daß er artig ist, dann ist er es. [418]

Jakob, first of all, transcends the school's principles by attempting to understand and articulate them. He finds the school aesthetically fascinating, thus not in the innocent, truly fixed manner with which Kraus at the same time thinks and is. Jakob also tends to romanticize the institute--

Was tun sie [i.e. the Benjamentas] da drinnen in der Wohnung immer? [. . .] Aber vielleicht dringe ich doch noch einmal in diese inneren Gemächer. Und was werden dann meine Augen erblicken? Vielleicht gar nichts besonderes? O doch, doch. Ich weiß, es gibt hier irgendwo wunderbare Dinge. [348]

--indicating his longing for a beautiful meaning, if not a more beautiful reality.¹¹ He imagines the Benjamentas as descended royalty and paints the mysterious "inner chambers", throughout the internal nucleus of the school in Jakob's eyes, in beautiful colours. Even after Jakob visits the Benjamentas--in their inexpensively furnished two-room apartment (460-61)--he is mainly preoccupied with his fantasy of a spacious castle. After deciding to confine himself strictly to the institute (444), the interpolation of several lengthy fantasies distinguishes Jakob's mental life from that purported by the school's empty formalism. He compensates for his isolation with imagination.

Secondly, Jakob's urge to know his surroundings severs him from the institute. On several occasions he explores the city or meets his wealthy bro-

-ther. (Whenever he returns from his excursions into town, Kraus mocks him: "'Welt kennen lernen' sagt er, wie in tiefe Gedanken versunken. Und er lächelt verächtlich." [367]) Jakob's efforts to establish a personal rapport with the other figures and especially with the institute's director, represent a related aspect of his urge to collect "experiences".

Mein Wunsch, Erfahrungen zu machen, wächst zu einer herrischen Leidenschaft heran, und der Schmerz, den mir der Unwille dieses seltsamen Mannes verursacht, ist nur klein gegen die bebende Begierde, ihn zu verleiten, sich ein wenig mir gegenüber auszusprechen. [373]

When Benjamenta for the first time falls out of his role while reading Jakob's ironic curriculum vitae ("Lebenslauf"), Jakob thinks:

[. . .] ich habe meinen Mann scharf beobachtet. Ein wenig gelächelt hat er [. . .]. Also endlich ein Zeichen von etwas Menschlichem. [. . .] Es ist ein Vorpostengefecht gewonnen. [379]

Jakob, as we know, finally leaves the school with Benjamenta instead of entering into service.

Thirdly, Jakob refuses to allow his own personality to be fixated. His love of role-playing first becomes apparent during encounters with a barber and a prostitute. Jakob refuses to disclose his identity to the former, while he pretends to be a gentleman with the latter.

Ich liebe es, derartige nationalistisch angefärbte Fragen mit eisernem Schweigen zu beantworten, und die Leute, die mich nach meinen Vaterlandsgefühlen fragen, im Unklaren zu lassen. [350]

Es bereitete mir ein Vergnügen ohnegleichen, dem Mädchen gegenüber den freien, obenherabschauenden Herrn zu spielen. [354]

Jakob, in this manner, enjoys provoking Kraus by intentionally mocking the institute or referring to its collapse (e.g. 414 and 467), but usually acts in total conformity with the institutional rules (e.g. 421, 423, 433) as Benjamenta approaches him in friendship! After Benjamenta suggests the joint departure, Jakob ironically replies:

'Aber der Brotkorb, Herr Vorsteher? Den andern verschaffen Sie Unterkommen, und gerade mir nicht? Das finde ich seltsam. Das ist nicht recht. Und ich bestehe darauf. Es ist Ihre Pflicht, mir einen ordentlichen Arbeitsposten zu vermitteln. Ich will unbedingt in Stellung und Amt gehen.' -- Ah, er zuckte zusammen. Er erschrak. Wie mußte ich innerlich kichern. [489]

As the above observations show, Jakob continually maintains a reference

to the totality of existential possibilities, either through an active will to experience, with subjectivity as expressed in imagination, or through avoidance of any definitive positions and relationships.¹² Yet Jakob never ceases to esteem what Kraus represents. Indeed, in the last entries of the diary he seems to accept--intellectually, at least--the nothingness of his existence. As Dagmar Grenz points out, this is the logical climax of his intellectual development, when his cultural criticism (see III.3. below) and the Benjamenta education are considered.¹³

Ich bin ja etwas so kleines. Daran, daran halte ich ungebunden fest, daran, daß ich klein, klein und nichtswürdig bin. [469]

Ich bin [. . .] gewachsen, älter geworden, aber das Wesen blieb. [. . .] Ich entwickle mich nicht. [. . .] Die Arme und Beine werden mir seltsam erschlaffen, der Geist, der Stolz, der Charakter, alles, alles wird brechen und welken, und ich werde tot sein, nicht wirklich tot, nur so auf eine gewisse Art tot, und dann werde ich vielleicht sechzig Jahre so dahinleben und -sterben. [472]

Jakob's aesthetic and existential needs thus do not correspond, rather they conflict. An alternation between antithetical poles--service and freedom, poverty and wealth, small and large, selflessness and self--pervades the basic structure of Jakob's thinking, indeed of the journal itself.¹⁴

Jakob adheres to the principle of antithesis until he stops writing, as can best be seen in his relationship to the two Benjamentas. Jakob is innately (not rationally or aesthetically) attracted to the brother rather than the sister.

Lisa Benjamenta is devoted to the idea of the school; she is its only teacher. The pupils gather every evening to sing her a lullaby. She appears in a white nightgown looking like an "angel" (362). Her face contains many of those elements which Jakob associates with an unworldly, pure inner sphere. She is "wie ein Geist [. . .], als wenn da jemand von weit, weit her käme."

Diese Augen! Sieht man sie einmal, so blickt man in etwas Abgrund-Banges und Tiefes hinein. Diese Augen scheinen in ihrer glänzenden Schwärze nichts und zugleich alles Unsagbare zu sagen, so bekannt und so unbekannt zugleich muten sie an. [400]

She displays prophetic powers as she guides Jakob through the metaphorical

"Gewölben und Gängen der Armut und Entbehrungen" (425-31). She proves to be both familiar with and removed from the object of her love. She cries in class. Unable to realize the intangible purity of inner being in the world--she dies.

'Jakob, ich sterbe, weil ich keine Liebe gefunden habe. [. . .] Ich gehe am Unverständnis derjenigen, die mich hätten sehen und fassen sollen, am Wahn der Vorsichtigen und Klugen, und an der Lieblosigkeit des Zauderns und des Nicht-recht-Mögens zugrunde. [. . .] Etwas das überlegen und unterscheiden kann, ist kein Gefühl.' [473-74]

Jakob's extremely sympathetic, but aloof attitude towards Lisa is not surprising. She, like Jakob, is something of an intellectual, who admires but can not be like Kraus. Jakob, unlike her, confronts the duality of being; Kraus, in his limited, dumb existence, is a whole, but at a price Jakob refuses to pay. Jakob's confusion and mistrust of consciousness are related to the equivocal nature of his longing. He has no solid foundations to rest on and all phenomena seem impenetrable and undefinable. While Jakob retains his individuality, Lisa is entirely resigned to regaining the inner unity she sees embodied in Kraus.

Herr Benjamenta personifies the counterpart to his sister: withdrawn, muscular, callous, a "Herkules", "Simson", "Löwe", and "Tiger" (346, 470, 436, 475). Klaus-Peter Philippi observes that Jakob's and Benjamenta's relationship is throughout founded on the conception of roles, i.e. director and pupil, not anything truly personal.¹⁵ The director remains silent and "reads newspapers" during a large portion of the novel. Undoubtedly the awakening affection he expresses towards the hero is based on his perception of the hero's somewhat perfunctory appreciation of the servants school. Benjamenta is, mainly, also skeptical about the institute's existential promise: "'Jakob', sagte er zu mir, 'sage mir, findest du nicht, daß das Leben, das du hier führst, karg ist, karg?'" (421) Jakob typically refuses to enter into confidence with Benjamenta (since this would imply determining his own position and ignoring the duality he accepts) and denies him a reply. Thus the respective roles are upheld, although Jakob, at least, is happy about--albeit wary of--this communication.¹⁶ Benjamenta, as Jochen Greven suggests, seems to represent a basic,

masculine life-force, which, compared to that of the sister, hovers in suspended animation at the school, "has not yet lived", and seeks to penetrate into an elementary, dionysian realm.¹⁷ "[. . .] ich will leben und lebend etwas wälzen, etwas tragen, etwas schaffen." (488) He tells Jakob,

'Du mußt wissen, mich packen Wildheiten an, und ehe ich mich verhindern kann, sind alle meine Besinnungen geschwunden.' [434]

Later he suddenly attacks and attempts to strangle his "kleiner Vertrauter" (470-71). Jakob is the stimulus which instigates Benjamenta's rebirth: the latter's long monologues¹⁸ reveal a quickening dissolution of inhibitions and invalid maxims. The school's collapse parallels the director's rebellion and Lisa's death. For unexplained reasons, Jakob and he are inextricably bound to each other, the real impetus, however, coming from the older man:

'Und nun frage ich dich, Schelm, der du mich mit so eigenartigen fröhlichen Ketten fesselst, willst du mit mir gehen, wollen wir zusammenbleiben, zusammen irgend etwas anfangen, etwas unternehmen, wagen, schaffen, wollen wir beide, du der Kleine, ich der Große, zusammen versuchen, wie wir das Leben bestehen?' [477]

III.3. Jakob's Renunciation of Society

The depth and seriousness of Jakob's alienation from traditional values is indicated by the radical, entirely voluntary abandonment of rich parentage and family tradition, indeed of all conventional involvement with society, in favour of (initially) a servants school and (subsequently) the union with Benjamenta and move to a "desert". Jakob's negative views of contemporary society are unequivocal. They are mainly expressed in connection with the school, but also specifically in his memories of life outside the school, in his descriptions of the city, in the "sleeping teachers" satire, and in his judgements of the people he gets to know through his brother.

Jakob's preliminary goal is to cut all ties with his old self, a vague plan, that he implements with the intention of beginning from "below". Jakob recalls his words to Benjamenta during their first encounter:

'[. . .] mein Vater sei Großvater, und ich sei ihm davongelaufen, weil ich gefürchtet hätte, von seiner Vortrefflichkeit erstickt zu werden.' [340]

He believes in the necessity of a new beginning that first requires a removal from the old order. In an early entry he simply notes:

Warum schreibe ich ihr [his mother] nie? Ich kann's nicht fassen, gar nicht begreifen, und doch kann ich mich nicht entschließen zu schreiben. [. . .] Schade, ich mag überhaupt nicht geliebt und begehrt sein. Sie sollen sich daran gewöhnen, keinen Sohn mehr zu haben. [350]

The curriculum vitae, which goes through several revisions (indicating a process of realization), deals with incongruence of inner and outer worlds and for the first time states the unsuitability of his cultural inheritance to the "times":

Die von Gunten sind ein altes Geschlecht. In früheren Zeiten waren sie Krieger, aber die Rauflust hat nachgelassen, und heute sind sie Großväter und Handelsleute, und der Jüngste des Hauses, Gegenstand dieses Berichtes, hat sich entschlossen, gänzlich von aller hochmütigen Tradition abzufallen. Er will, daß das Leben ihn erziehe, nicht erbliche oder irgend adlige Grundsätze. Allerdings ist er stolz, denn es ist ihm unmöglich, die angeborene Natur zu verleugnen, aber er versteht unter Stolz etwas Neues, gewissermaßen der Zeit, in der er lebt, Entsprechendes. [379]

Jakob's memories of home are--paradoxically--extremely positive.¹⁹

Felsen und Wälder, Hügel und Felder waren mit ein paar Schritten zu erreichen. Stimmen und Düfte waren immer da. Und die Straßen der Stadt glichen Gartenwegen, so weich und reinlich sahen sie aus. [349]

There are also nostalgic memories of his mother, the family servant and the house. (446). Nevertheless, Jakob's social criticism is directed against stagnating intellectual values and against the lack of substance and "true" human potential within his family and social class. It is precisely the family pride which compels him to undertake an anomalous and complete break with his own past in search of new and viable values. And he believes that the rejection of his heritage must be uncompromising, for the first time explaining these convictions towards the middle of the journal:

[. . .] um mich quasi selbst zu erziehen, oder mich auf eine künftige Selbsterziehung vorzubereiten, deshalb bin ich Zögling dieses Institutes Benjaminta geworden, denn hier macht man sich auf irgend etwas

Schweres und Duster-Daherkommendes gefaßt. Und deshalb schreibe ich ja auch nicht nach Hause, denn schon das Berichterstatten allein würde mir den Plan, ganz von unten anzufangen, vollkommen verleiden. Etwas Großes und Kühnes muß in aller Verschwiegenheit und Stille geschehen, sonst verdirbt und verflaut es, und das Feuer, das schon lebendig erwachte, stirbt wieder. [397]

Jakob's acceptance of a servant's school for an appropriate education provides the central thrust of Walser's criticism of society. The institute and the "world" can not really be divided, since the former prepares for the mode of existence in the world: isolation, intellectual bankruptcy, anonymity, lack of individuality, absurd procedures and values. It is well-stated when Dagmar Grenz recognizes a relationship between the school's educational methods and the hollowness of motivated thought and social striving in the modern era: "Gerade ihre [i.e. the methods'] Sinnlosigkeit ist in der gegenwärtigen Zeit das Sinnvolle."²⁰ Jakob is an "individualist" who realizes the impossibility of real individuality in his age. In contrast to his brother's friends' or his parents' efforts to conform to empty cultural standards and maintain a sense of self esteem, Jakob (half-ironically) accepts the consciousness-reductive ideal of subservience. He notes:

Ich fühle, wie wenig mich das angeht, was man Welt nennt, und wie mir groß und hinreißend vorkommt, das, was ich Welt nenne, ganz im stillen. Mein Bruder hat sich indes Mühe gegeben, mich unter Menschen zu führen, und es ist Pflicht für mich, mir viel daraus zu machen. [. . .] Ein paar Menschen vollkommen kennen zu lernen, dazu bedürfte es eines Menschenlebens. Das sind nun wieder Benjamentische Grundsätze, und wie unähnlich sind Benjamentas dem, was Welt bedeutet. [444]

Jakob often thinks he could exist as a servant, thereby retaining inner freedom because he would be acting according to an unquestioned subjugation to external laws.²¹ He can not, of course, accept the school as a real "solution".

Jakob's satiric fantasy of the "sleeping teachers" (386-87) amounts to a general statement concerning modern culture's "geistigen Inhalte und deren bildenden lebensformenden Wert."²² The various teachers of his former school days--of natural history, language, religion, mathematics, etc.

--are scattered about an "extra für die Ruhebedürftigen eingerichteten" room at the Benjamenta school. Jakob's playful-ironic description is based on his recognition of the uselessness of traditional classified bodies of knowledge in the modern world. "Wunderliche Gefühle ergreifen mich, wenn ich an die armen Eingeschlummerten und Geistesabwesenden denke." (386) The French teacher's classes "sind immer nur eine Lüge und papierne Maske gewesen." The pastor's hours: "Religion, sehen Sie, taugt heute nichts mehr. Der Schlaf ist religiöser als all Ihre Religion. Wenn man schläft ist man Gott vielleicht noch am nächsten." History: "Die Welt dreht sich seit einiger Zeit um Geld und nicht mehr um Geschichte. All die uralten Heldentugenden, die Sie auspacken, spielen ja, wie Sie selbst wissen werden, längst keine Rolle mehr." (386-87) Jakob does not claim to be sentimental.

Bin ich verantwortlich für den Geist des Zeitalters? Ich nehme die Zeit, wie sie ist, und behalte mir nur vor, im stillen meine Beobachtungen zu machen." [398]

"Im stillen" implies from his retreat at the institute, which rates thoughtlessness as its most sacred goal.

Jakob gains access to a portion of what he terms "world" through his brother. His general skepticism regarding the viability of extant social structures is strengthened after meeting his brother's circle. Jakob perceives a conflict between "I" and "world", which is notable most poignantly in refined strata of society.

Alle sind einander ähnlich in einer gewissen, rasch dahinsausenden Liebenswürdigkeit, und ich glaube, das ist das Bangen, das diese Leute empfinden. [. . .] Diese Leute sind Kavaliere. Und sie scheinen sich nie ganz wohl zu befinden. Wer kann sich wohl befinden, wer auf die Achtungsbezeugungen der Welt Wert liegt? [443]

Jakob expresses the antagonistic relationship between what he often terms "Lebensmut" and any existential compromise. Jakob perceives rules for social conduct as part of a delicate effete system, which simultaneously conceal and expose the artificiality of social existence.

Sie verachten niemanden, diese guten Leute, und doch, vielleicht verachten sie alles, aber das dürfen sie nicht zeigen, und zwar deshalb nicht, weil sie fürchten, plötzlich etwa eine Unvorsichtigkeit zu begehen. Sie sind liebenswürdig aus Weltschmerz und nett aus Bangen. Und dann will ja jeder Achtung vor sich selber haben. [. . .] Und dann, glaube ich, fühlen diese Menschen, da sie doch einmal Gesellschafts- und durchaus keine Naturmenschen sind, stets den Nachfolger hinter sich. Es herrscht unter diesen Kreisen der fortschrittlichen

Bildung eine kaum zu übersehende Müdigkeit, [. . .] die Müdigkeit des gesunden-ungesunden Menschen. [443-44]

Jakob again here portrays society and nature as diametrically opposed, and senses a profound split between manner and true being, that manifests itself in vague neurotic symptoms ("Bangen", "sich nie ganz wohl befinden", "Müdigkeit"). Jakob suggests that his brother's friends' congeniality disguises a deeper fear involving a disrooted personal identity. As Dagmar Grenz points out, these people feel threatened in their carefully attained positions, are anxious to confirm their normality, are loving due to the fear of making a "mistake". Jakob decides that every compromise with social norms amounts to a falsification of "life".

The theme of social alienation lies at the core of the novel. Jakob's criticism just confirms what he already must have suspected at home. Social estrangement is the explanation given for his prognosis of his own future ("Ich werde eine reizende kugelrunde Null im späteren Leben sein" 336), for his enrolment in the school, and also explicitly the motivation for his departure at the diary's termination. Jakob recalls a portion of the dream which immediately precedes the novel's close:

[. . .] wir waren ganz eigentümlich belebt von einer kühlen, ich möchte sage, großartigen Zufriedenheit. Es sah so aus, als wenn wir beide dem, was man europäische Kultur nennt, für immer, oder wenigstens für sehr, sehr lange Zeit entschwunden gewesen seien. [490]

The aloof approach we have observed in regard to various situations is a result of Jakob's inner doubt, which is aroused through his radical social and cultural alienation. He is alienated because he believes his reference to the inner being would be lost, were he to compromise with the practical--and sterile--values of his age. Greven formulates this especially clearly:

[. . .] der wahre Grund menschlichen Daseins ist durch die Objektivationen [sic] der freien, als gegen die unmittelbare Verwurzelung im Sein gerichteten Aktivität verstellt; er vermag sich also nicht mehr frei zu ihm zu verhalten und verfällt einer Verfremdung.²³

Jakob is unable, for one, to transcend the resulting conflict (except with irony) and thus can give neither his surroundings nor abstract conceptions objective form. However he is also unwilling to define either

his own position or external phenomena, since this would imply conceding an inherently false delimitation of the inner being, which must remain free and detached.²⁴

By his own admission, Jakob is "ein Verschollener". He can do little more than recognize the duality of his situation.

Ich bleibe vielleicht als irgendwo im Leben verlorener und verschollener Mensch ein echterer, stolzerer Gunten, als wenn ich, auf den Stammbaum pochend, zu Hause verdürbe, entherzte und verknöcherte. [. . .] In mir lebt eine sonderbare Energie, das Leben von Grund auf kennen zu lernen [. . .] . [442]

Gerhard Pinieel emphasizes Jakob's double estrangement, once from the existing social order and again from the school:

Alle Mitschüler Jakobs finden am Ende eine Stelle, nur er selber nicht. Er bleibt, der er war, ein Nichts, eine Null, ohne sich zu entwickeln, ohne sich je einordnen zu können.²⁵

But Jakob, at least, actively confronts the duality of being, while the other pupils (and, to a lesser degree, his brother) passively accept a loss of individuality. He is not a "Nichts" or a "Null", but rather they. Jakob purposely leaves home, enters the school and finally chooses the unusual union with Benjamenta. It is not his brother's friends or his parents, who find him unfit.

III.4. Jakob's Diary

The diary form is especially well-suited for the development of a style which expresses Jakob's intellectual ambivalence through the suspension of normal language and imagery. Just as Jakob avoids or is unable to commit himself to consistent relationships, to single positions or ideas, his writing is a collection of heterogeneous stylistic elements. Because Jakob is fundamentally anti-intellectual, he grants language and symbolism little value, although he constantly (necessarily) seeks to establish and articulate logical connections.

The most striking techniques are those of negation and contrast. Walter Benjamin's informative lead reads: "Alles scheint ihm [Walser] verloren, ein Wortschall bricht aus, in dem jeder Satz nur die Aufgabe hat, den vo-

-rigen vergessen zu machen."²⁶ Either from entry to entry or from sentence to sentence, Jakob's diary continually reveals contradictions and apparently unmotivated changes of topic.²⁷

The entry on pp. 445-46, approximately between the second and last third of the novel, is a characteristic example. The intensification of Jakob's identity crisis, which is depicted in this self-reflective passage, might be brought about by the rejection of his brother's circle, that is justified in the preceding entry.

- (1) Ich vergesse nie, daß ich ein Abkömmling bin, der nun von unten, von ganz unten anfängt,
- (2) ohne doch die Eigenschaften, die nötig sind, emporzugelangen, zu besitzen.
- (3) Vielleicht ja. Es ist alles möglich,
- (4) aber ich glaube nicht an die eitlen Stunden, in denen ich mir Glück, verbunden mit Glanz, vorspiegle. Ich habe gar keine Emporkömmlingstugenden.
- (5) Ich bin manchmal frech, aber nur aus Laune.
- (6) Der Emporkömmling aber ist von einer permanenten bescheiden-tuenden Frechheit, oder von einer frechen, fortwährend frechen Unbedeutendheitsgebärde. Und es gibt viele Emporkömmlinge, und was sie errungen haben, das halten sie stupide fest,
- (7) und das ist ausgezeichnet. Sie können auch nervös sein, ungehalten, verdrießlich und 'all der Dinge' müde, aber der Überdruß dringt nicht tief beim wahrhaften Emporkömmling. Emporkömmlinge sind Herren,
- (8) und solch einem Herrn, einem vielleicht etwas protzigen Herrn, werde ich Abkömmling, oder was ich sonst bin, dienen, und ehrenhaft dienen, treu, verlässlich, fest, ganz gedankenlos, ganz unerpicht auf persönliche Vorteile, denn nur so, nämlich ganz anständig, werde ich überhaupt jemandem dienen können,
- (9) und jetzt merke ich, daß ich Verwandtes mit Kraus habe, und ich schäme mich beinahe ein wenig. Nie und nimmer erreicht man mit Empfindungen, wie die sind, mit denen ich der Welt gegenüberstehe, je Großes, es sei denn, man pfeife aufs glitzernde Große und nenne das groß, was ganz grau, still, hart und niedrig ist.
- (10) Ja, dienen werde ich, und Verpflichtungen, deren Erfüllung nichts weniger als schimmert, werde ich immer und immer übernehmen, immer wieder, und ich werde kreuzdumm vor Seligkeit erröten, wenn man mir leichthin Dank sagt.
- (11) Dumm ist das, aber durchaus wahr,

- (12) und ich bin nicht fähig, über diese Wahrnehmung trauig zu sein.
ich muß es bekennen: ich bin nie trauig [. . .]

In (1) Jakob reconfirms his heritage and general purpose for being at the school. Twice, however, Jakob uses exaggerations which deprive his statement of its credibility. Instead of writing, "Ich will nie vergessen", he emphasizes, "Ich vergesse nie", and, having used once such gradation, continues, "von unten, von ganz unten". Jakob is unbelievable because we know that he often holds a different position, e.g. whenever he longs for wealth and freedom. He wants to convince himself of his position, not portray it. In (2)--still the same sentence--some confusion develops. Does he not want to rise up in the world because of the previous socially-critical conclusions, or is it because he does not possess the necessary qualities, implying that he might still want to? (3) expresses the uncertainty of his beliefs, but this is a vague doubt, which pertains neither directly to (1) nor (2). In (4), however, he embarks on the theme of (2), thus changing his original approach by attempting a negative definition, i.e. of what he is not. He only succeeds in reiterating (2) by paraphrasing, leading to a contradiction: "Es ist alles möglich"/ "Ich habe gar keine Emporkömmlingstugenden". (5) reveals (4) to be conditional, whereas in (6) he attempts to account for the association made in (5) between "Frechheit" and "Emporkömmlingstugenden", thereby forgetting himself as the (original) subject of the entry. Jakob succeeds in making distinctions between various degrees of "Frechheit", but with the redundant repetition of the key attribute. Then he simply adds that there are "viele Emporkömmlinge", so that the conjunction "Und" appears superfluous, there being no relation between the content of the two clauses. In (7) Jakob executes a reversal from (6)--"stupid"/ "ausgezeichnet"--as he considers another viewpoint. The neurotic symptoms he detects in "Emporkömmlinge" would be of minor importance for the committed and well-adjusted man ("wahren Emporkömmling"), who would not experience Jakob's existential doubt. Thus it is not until (8) that Jakob returns to the problem dealt with in (1): his own situation. The "Sprachverwilderung" and "Geschwätzigkeit", which Walter Benjamin considers to be the major distinction of Walser's style, is particularly evident here. No statement has any conclusive me-

-rit, but must be qualified with an apposition. As the critical motif of service occurs, there follows a string of adjectives, which he then attempts to integrate with another cohesive adjective: "anständig". These techniques, just as the modifications of a single concept in (4) and the "corrective" juxtaposition of unrelated or incongruous elements, as in (1) and (2) or (6) and (7), function to negate the qualitative worth of each statement and suggest the impossibility of a conclusive sentence. As we can see by categorizing sentence parts according to content, these are "run-on" sentences, which originate from the intention to include as many different aspects as possible, not from the principle of organization. This also applies to the entry as a whole. And Jakob is only dealing with a hypothetical future in (8) ("nur so [. . .] werde ich [. . .] dienen können"), leaving the present moment and his actual condition unclarified. This leads to another contradiction before the sentence ends. Does he want to serve, or to acquire "Großes"? We see that Jakob does not attempt to resolve the paradox, but purposely expounds (removed in the third-person) on a position related to that of (7), thereby matching the series of adjectives found in (8) with complementary ones, which disclose the antithetical view: "grau, still, hart und niedrig". In (10) he transcends the immediacy of the conflict with ironic resignation. Irony which expresses the relativity and distance between narrator and narration already occurs through the word-play based on the notion of "Frechheit" in (6) and of "Emporkömmling" in (8), as well as through the qualifications in (8): "einem Herrn, einem vielleicht etwas protzigen Herrn"; "Abkömmling, oder was ich sonst bin". In (10) he expresses the subjunctive nature²⁸ of each perspective view and subjective conclusion by playfully-ironically maintaining an arbitrary idea he has already seen through several times earlier in the journal. Using variations on the techniques described above (contradiction, negation, exaggeration, qualification, irony, etc.), Jakob discusses a neutral topic in (11) and (12), and for the remainder of the entry, thus leaving a figurative question mark at its end.

The capacity of the word to explain and clarify is reduced because of the choice of vocabulary, as well as through the other forms of negation men-

-tioned above. Nine versions of "Emporkömmling" (including pronouns representing it) appear on half a page. What do simple words like "dumm", "unten", "groß", "müde", "anständig", "ganz", "frech", etc., mean after they are repeated again and again in important passages? Absurd distinctions are achieved when these are paired with more expressive ones, e.g. "frechen Unbedeutendheitsgebärde". A similar "destruction" of language occurs through the direct juxtaposition of the same or a similar word.

nicht dumm, beschränkt vielleicht [352]

stumpfsinnig oder nicht stumpfsinnig sitzen müssen [361]

hängt nicht und hängt doch von solchen Dingen ab [378]

so bekannt und so unbekannt [400]

Und doch wird es sein müssen. Sein müssen? [455]

Furthermore the selection of vocabulary, just as the content, proceeds largely on the basis of tonal-rhythmic possibilities²⁹ and unmotivated logical association (not through the principle of volition): "Abkömmling"/ "Emporkömmling" (antonym, timbre); "Glück"/ "Glanz" (timbre); "glitzernde Große" (timbre); "frechen, fortwährend frechen" (alliteration); "Herrn"/ "Diener" (antonym); "groß"/ "niedrig" (antonym).

The imagery correspondingly tends to shroud rather than illuminate, often appearing grotesque or sinister, when man is associated with collapse of a viable order in the city or with the institute's laws.³⁰

- (1) Ich werde eine reizende, kugelrunde Null im späteren Leben sein. [336]
- (2) Das Gute, Reine und Hohe irgend, irgendwo versteckt in Nebeln zu wissen [. . .]: daran bin ich gewöhnt./ Ich sah als Kind eines Tages einen in Blut schwimmenden, von zahlreichen Messerstichen durchbohrten, wälschen Fabrikarbeiter an einer Mauer tot daliegen. [369]
- (3) Der Hof liegt verlassen da wie eine viereckige Ewigkeit. [399]
- (4) [. . .] da schwamm ich in einem dickflüssigen, höchst unangenehmen Strom von Zweifel. [430]
- (5) Etwas wie treibende, schonungslose Energie/ schlägt hier rauschend die Flügel zusammen. [455]
- (6) '[. . .] in Wüsten oder auf Eisbergen im nördlichen Meere/ zu leben [. . .]' [476]

The darkening effect is accomplished through the pairing of incongruous elements: emotions and abstractions (1) and (4), beauty and death (2),

finite and infinite (3), inorganic and organic (5), nothingness and life (6). In those instances where Jakob fails to distinguish between reality and fantasy, the paradoxical, irrational effect is considerably heightened.³¹

The aloofness which we have already seen to characterize Jakob's behaviour is maintained in the diary by his stylistic and intellectual ambiguity. He manipulates traditional structural rules in order to express what appears inexpressible, thus leaving as much unsaid as said. Martin Jürgens aptly writes:

Daß die Spannung zwischen Anpassung und Selbstbehauptung für den Künstler als Außenseiter die Tendenz hat, sich zur Krise der Darstellbarkeit zu verschärfen, ist die Erfahrung, die das Tagebuch als 'Ichbuch' dokumentiert. [. . .] Wo die Krise der Darstellbarkeit unter der Hand selbst zum Thema wird, steht hinter dem Satz, der die Erwartung des sich seiner Situation bewußten, ästhetisch handelnden Subjekts ausdrückt, das Fragezeichen.³²

Our notes concerning language confirm the thematic conclusions reached in connection with the aspired reduction of consciousness through service: by applying the principles of contrast and negation, Jakob's "real" self remains unfixed.

III.5. The Final Dream and Jakob's Departure

The reason why Jakob breaks off several of the later entries prefigures the final renunciation of thought and writing.

Ich verbiete mir, mir das erklären zu wollen. Ich will hell, leicht und heiter bleiben. [423]

Geb' es gern zu, daß ich schwatze, denn mit etwas müssen doch Zeilen ausgefüllt werden. Wie entzückend, wie entzückend sind verbotene Früchte. [433]

Ach, all diese Gedanken, all dies sonderbare Sehnen, dieses Suchen, dieses Hände-Ausstrecken nach einer Bedeutung. Mag es träumen, mag es schlafen. Ich lasse es einfach nun kommen. [469-70]

The theme of these quotations is not the general impossibility of expounding "reality", as Dagmar Grenz argues,³³ but the impossibility of giving concrete expression to an absolute which is essentially negative and without content by definition. Therefore also the thoroughgoing criticism of consciousness, which, as such, can never cease its "struggle" between

these aesthetic principles and the necessary finite assertion of self. Jakob's "negative" absolute can only be granted true expression in a dream, i.e. at that time when the rational-logical functions of the mind are relaxed. He employs the technique of pairing conceptual and material forms to create an image that might be found in the works of a Novalis:

Mir träumte [. . .], ich befände mich auf einer Bergmatte. Sie war mit Blumen wie mit blumenhaft gebildeten und geformten Küssen bestickt und besetzt. Bald erschienen mir die Küsse wie Sterne, bald wieder wie Blumen. Es war Natur und doch keine, Bildnis und Körper zugleich. [489]

Jakob can not translate these images into practical terms, as he himself states some lines later:

'Aha', dachte ich unwillkürlich, und wie mir schien, ziemlich dumm: 'Das war es also, das!' -- Aber was es war, was ich da dachte, konnte ich nicht enträtseln. [490-91]

Jakob's and Benjamenta's departure also "occurs" in this dream. The previous roles of headmaster and student are preserved as knight and page. Jakob accepts a subordinate position in "fulfillment" of his earlier convictions and intentions. And simultaneously Jakob, a latter-day Peter Schlemihl,³⁴ "realizes" a certain impulse towards a comprehensive encounter with the world, as he and Benjamenta wander through foreign continents, removed, to be sure, from European culture. Jakob's thus designated aesthetic and existential needs are reconciled in this fantastic projection of an ideal solution. In the words of Jochen Greven,

[. . .] reiner Dienst und totale Welterfahrung [. . .], bewußtlose Hingabe und überbewußte subjektive Freiheit gehen auf in dem Entwurf eines Daseins im 'Schlaf'.³⁵

But all this occurs, as said, in a dream, i.e. not in reality. Natural consequences of conflicting ideas are forced with a mathematical imperative to an impossible conclusion: the conscious disavowal of thought. The novel becomes a game, a piece of fiction:

Und wenn ich zerschelle und verderbe, was verdirbt dann? Eine Null. Ich einzelner Mensch bin nur eine Null. Aber weg jetzt mit der Feder. Weg jetzt mit dem Gedankenleben. Ich gehe mit Herrn Benjamenta in die Wüste. Will doch sehen, ob es sich in der Wildnis nicht auch leben, atmen, sein, aufrichtig Gutes wollen und tun und nachts

schlafen und träumen läßt. Ach was. Jetzt will ich an gar nichts mehr denken. Auch an Gott nicht? Nein! Gott wird mit mir sein. Was brauche ich da an ihn zu denken? Gott geht mit den Gedankenlosen. Nun denn adieu, Institut Benjamenta.

[492]

The decision to stop writing is the consequential result of his previously developed position and parallels the decision to "stop thinking". Its meaning is, of course, ambiguous, and this even more so, when the last entry is viewed as the ironic dissolution of the work itself. As a diary, the literary work is easily recognizable as fiction, whose ostensible author, consciously or unconsciously, conveys the necessity of an adjustment to society, although also, as Martin Jürgens points out, the necessary "Selbstbehauptung des Individuums gegenüber ihren Ansprüchen."³⁶

The selflessness which Jakob accepts could be the prerequisite for a new beginning, whereby he, together with the force represented by Benjamenta, would leave the solipsistic solution of the institute, retain a basic tension and hope to regain the world. But any such categorization of being, just as the use of the desert metaphor to represent an appropriate spiritual landscape, is simultaneously an expression of extreme isolation, whose fundamental cause I think Jochen Greven has accurately noted:

Dieses 'rien ne va plus' ist der kritische Schlußpunkt eines Spiels, das das Zeitalter des Individualismus mit immer höheren Einsätzen durchspielte, in dem mit den praktischen Lebenszielen auch alle höheren Güter des Geistes zuletzt der Entfremdung anheim fielen-- dem Prozeß, der aus Wissen, Kunst und Religion materiale Mittel zu Zwecken und zuletzt Waren machte.³⁷

Notes

1. Quotes are from Volume IV of the collected works edited by Jochen Greven: Robert Walser, Geschwister Tanner, Jakob von Gunten (Genf and Hamburg: Kossodo Verlag, 1967).
2. Dierk Rodewald, Robert Walsers Prosa--Versuch einer Strukturanalyse (Bad Homburg, Berlin, and Zurich: Gehlen Verlag, 1970), pp. 94-95.
3. See Dagmar Grenz, Die Romane Robert Walsers (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1974), p. 119.
4. Compare Felix Strebel, Das Ironische in Robert Walsers Prosa (Zurich: Juris Verlag, 1974), p. 46.
5. Klaus-Peter Philippi discusses the structural function of the diary form in "Robert Walser, Jakob von Gunten", Provokation und Idylle, Beiheft 1 (1971), pp. 51-53.
See also Dagmar Grenz, pp. 96-97, and Dierk Rodewald, pp. 94-95.
6. See Nagi Naguib, Robert Walser, Entwurf einer Bewußtseinsstruktur (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1970), pp. 64-66.
7. Acceleration and retardation are also discussed by George Avery, Inquiry and Testament, pp. 166-76.
8. See Klaus-Peter Philippi, pp. 51-52.
9. George Avery, p. 92.
10. Jochen Greven, Existenz, Welt und reines Sein im Werk Robert Walsers (Cologne: Klekamp Verlag, 1960), respectively title, pp. 76, 80, and 85.
11. Dagmar Grenz notes Jakob's tendency to yearn for wealth and splendour, an attribute she associates with his lost family heritage: p. 143.
12. See Jochen Greven, pp. 70-72 and 88-89; see also Nagi Naguib, pp. 68-69.
13. Compare Dagmar Grenz, p. 153.
14. Herbert Kaufman comes to a similar conclusion in his dissertation by demonstrating "the existence of a fundamental dualism which takes the form of an alternation between antithetical poles." See: Herbert Kaufman, "The Narrative Structure in Robert Walser's Geschwister Tanner, Der Gehülfe and Jakob von Gunten", Diss. New York Univ. 1969, p. 206.
15. See Klaus-Peter Philippi, p. 63.
16. "Und jetzt? Sind wir Freunde? Sind Herr Benjamenta und ich Freunde? Jedenfalls besteht zwischen uns beiden ein Verhältnis, aber was für eins?" (423)
17. Compare Jochen Greven, p. 93.
18. Jakob von Gunten, pp. 455-57, 476-78, 483-85, 486-89.
19. Compare Dagmar Grenz, p. 131.
20. Ibid, p. 134. Klaus-Peter Philippi, however, incorrectly fails to grant the institution the value it acquires in the context of Walser's

novel. He writes: "Ein Sinn des Ganzen wird nicht genannt; quasi rituelle, festgelegte Verhaltensformen [. . .] reduzieren das Subjekt, bis es zum bloßen Objekt der abstrakten 'unerbittlichen Vorschriften' wird. Das Erschreckende daran ist: Das Bewußtsein, dem dies geschieht, produziert im Prozeß dieser Selbstverfremdung einen perversen Sinn des Geschehens für sich, indem es fortschreitendes Einverständnis damit entwickelt." (p. 58)

21. Compare Nagi Naguib, p. 77.
22. Jochen Greven, pp. 78-79.
23. Ibid, p. 174.
- 24.. See Dagmar Grenz, pp. 125-27 and 154; Felix Strebel, pp. 108-12; Jochen Greven, pp. 70-72 and 173-75.
25. Gerhard Piniel, "Robert Walsers Roman Jakob von Gunten" Schweizer Monatshefte, 43 (1963), p. 1183.
26. Walter Benjamin, "Robert Walser" in Schriften, Volume II, edited by Th. Adorno and Gretel Adorno (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955), p. 149.
27. See George Avery, p. 163. '
28. Dierk Rodewald refers to Walser's "konjunktivische Sageweise", p. 100 and pp. 164-75.
29. Felix Strebel, p. 112.
30. Dagmar Grenz, p. 115.
31. This occurs during the "sleeping teachers" episode (386-87) and during the descent to the underground passageways (425-31).
32. Martin Jürgens, Robert Walser, Die Krise der Darstellbarkeit (Kronberg: Taunus Verlag, 1973), pp. 107-08.
33. Grenz refers to the "Unerklärbarkeit der Wirklichkeit", p. 119.
34. Peter Schlemihl, the hero of Adalbert von Chamisso's fairy tale-novelle "Peter Schlemihl's wundersame Geschichte" (1814), loses a social identity, but finds some measure of satisfaction by exploring the world with his newly-found "seven-mile boots".
35. See Jochen Greven, p. 95.
36. Martin Jürgens, p. 108.
37. Jochen Greven, in the Afterword of Geschwister Tanner, Jakob von Gunten, p. 520.

IV. Amerika and Jakob von Gunten (with Notes concerning "Beschreibung eines Kampfes")

After having discussed Kafka's and Walser's novels separately, we now proceed to a comparative analysis, trying to answer the four basic questions raised in the introduction: (1) Do the methods of narration really form "opposites", which effectively obscure all other stylistic and thematic similarities? (2) What factors determine the heroes' crises and what is the nature of their struggles? (3) Exactly how related are Kafka's and Walser's socially-critical positions? (4) How is it possible to narrate "realistisch" and at the same time let "die gesamte Choreographie tieferer Sinnbezüglichkeit" appear?

IV.1. Narration

In each novel the fictional reality is (or is pretended to be) a function of the hero's consciousness. Contradictory detail thereby signals the subjective character of the narrative. We have no realistic or naturalistic representations of a fictional world, the determination of all matter and persons being highly personal. Both authors are primarily concerned with depicting the problem of individuality, not the world. The attitude of the reader is likely to be critical and dispassionate, implying non-indentification with the thought processes of the central figure.

Since the form or significance of no phenomenon can be clearly distinguished from the conscious or unconscious conceptions of the heroes, all descriptions of characters, landscapes, architecture, etc. tend to acquire flat, unreal qualities for the reader. The puzzling and opaque properties of Kafka's and Walser's worlds have been widely noted. Typical is Bernard Rang's reference to Walser's "[...] seltsame Mischung rührender Einfalt und bittersüßer Hintergründigkeit [...]", which "[...] eine gleichnis-hafte Welt, die an Kafka gemahnen könnte, [...] verbirgt oder enthüllt [...]"¹ Similarly, George Avery's designation of the Benjamenta Institute as "surreal" and his statement that it "[...] shares in and, indeed, is largely the source of the mystery and ambiguity objectified in the narrator of the novel"² correspond to the emphasis on the dreamlike and para-

-bolic aspects of Kafka's work, which prevailed in critical literature into the 1960s. All of these interpretations fail to note that Kafka and Walser are dealing with problems of cognition; the mystery and the "sur-real" qualities are not founded in Walser's school or in Kafka's buildings, but in the heroes' perceptions of them.

Kafka/ Karl and Walser/ Jakob both narrate ironically: they pretend to inform the reader seriously and as accurately as possible, while simultaneously hinting at some quite different point of view, by making use of exaggerations, qualifications, or contradictions. Kafka thus underlines the empirical character of Karl's thought processes, leaving the true, complete picture of "reality" (and of Karl's situation) undefined. Walser accomplishes the same; Jakob expresses, however, his own unwillingness to make a definite statement while harboring a dual set of values. As Kafka, he leaves the "real" state of affairs undetermined. The narrative expositions of, for instance, the heroes' origins are ironic in make-up, because so little is explained, while traditional forms are (superficially) adhered to. (Compare p. 26 and p. 59 above.)

These observations reveal a fundamental similarity in the novels, but also suggest important distinctions. Kafka adopts the viewpoint of his main character for his narration in order to depict problems of consciousness and perception. Walser does the same. But Kafka also wants specifically to illustrate the nature of the association between individual consciousness and world. Everything seems to move too fast for Karl, he misinterprets the characters and the intentions of the men and women he meets, he presumes his own innocence and, in doing so, makes it a way of self-assertion to find fault with others, respectively, with society. The hero is conceived as a sixteen-year-old foreign immigrant in order to make the discordance between conception and reality obvious in a fictional context. Karl's naivety causes misconceptions and a real or imagined sense of isolation. Kafka is dealing with the problem of knowledge.

Not so Walser; nowhere in Jakob von Gunten is the hero's often extreme subjectivity judged critically. It is, in fact, an integral element of

Jakob's philosophy, that there is more than one "truth". The problem of communication, of a "Du", is hardly of foremost importance, as in Amerika. The narrative device of implementing the main character as "author" serves only to portray his aesthetics, i.e. to depict antipathetic intellectual structures. Jakob's problems originate outside his person; he has no feeling of guilt.

The difference in the functions of the narrative modes becomes clear when we consider the theme of "Beschreibung eines Kampfes", where Kafka also used the first-person tense. The "I"'s dissatisfaction is directed at the limitations of consciousness. He is intensely aware of the subjective nature of his thought processes and his struggle ensues from this point. The problem is dealt with at length in the middle portion of the story, where it is directly associated with existential insecurity. Walser's hero is not, to repeat, responsible to a presumed objective standard. Any fear he may experience is not related to "false" perceptions of the world.

It is tempting to conclude, as Karl Pestalozzi and Christof Schmid have done, that Kafka's "use of language" is "less subjective".³ Kafka narrates strictly in the past tense and avoids the use of foreshadowing and retardation. The narrative flow appears uniform in the novel, since Kafka retains Karl's view according to a plausible forward progression in time. Sentences are bound by a rigorous logic. Dialogues are accurately rendered as they occur within the time scheme. Jakob, on the other hand, is permitted unlimited freedom to switch to past and future tenses in the medium of a diary--as well as to mix his depiction of events and dialogues with disordered commentary and analysis. In both novels the extant moment is splattered from past and future time--since the present always remains undefined. Kafka, however, only renders conscious processes as they correspond to the immediate experience (sein), while the focus of Walser's narrative lies in the future (werden). In Jakob von Gunten an individual is allowed to freely associate, but the omnipresent narrator of Amerika is bound to a logical program.

The narrative methods found in Walser's book actually resemble those of

"Beschreibung eines Kampfes" more than those of Kafka's first novel. In the former works, the hero-narrators themselves express their positions, thereby intentionally applying the techniques of antithesis and negation to juxtapose conflicting points of view and to suspend, as George Avery points out, intellectual presuppositions.⁴ Within relatively short narrative units (e.g. single sentences or paragraphs), entirely contradictory views are claimed to be maintained with all seriousness (compare pp. 9-10, 12 and pp. 73-75 above). The heroes relate their mistrust of consciousness in a similar way: it is explicitly described in the texts (compare quotes pp. 11, 14-15 and pp. 62-63, 65 above). This is an interesting contrast to Amerika, where the narrator (Kafka) avoids any critical-intellectual comment, expressing the hero's difficulties only in terms of what he does and how he perceives, or with a parabolic representation (see pp. 41-42 above). In Jakob von Gunten and "Beschreibung eines Kampfes" we also find that the fantasies and dreams or, respectively, parables, are of anomalous character (less so in Kafka's second version), while in Amerika they are hardly distinguishable from the remainder of the novel. Unity of time is also lacking in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes" (less so in the second version), as becomes obvious by considering the involved metaphorical play of the middle section. However obvious these observations may seem, they are necessary to show that the similarity between the Kafka of 1905 and 1912 is primarily thematic. His mature point of view exposes the empirical character of the intellect in a realistic context, whereas the early work merely pointed it out in theory, placing more emphasis on the subject's own problematic states of consciousness. This resembles Walser's procedure in Jakob von Gunten. Kafka rejected the less astringent form of his own early work in favour of a more consistent and more removed narrative viewpoint. This can be seen as implying also a criticism of Walser's continued highly subjective narrative style. (Compare Jochen Greven, p. 3 above.)

Thus Christof Schmid's and Karl Pestalozzi's claims are confirmed, although only when we look at the methods of narration as such in the two novels. They are right insofar as Walser's more "personal" style does not serve to delineate relationships between consciousness and the "objective" external world (see p. 2 above). But, although the methods of narration are not

identical, the organization of the narratives in the novels is governed by similar rules: the dualistic structure of a central character's ideals and the antithetical movement of his thought processes and behaviour. The attitude of the reader is similar with both authors: he is required to "actively" apply conceptual or discursive aspects to the heroes' thought and behaviour. (In Jakob von Gunten this is fairly obvious, in Amerika less so, since the realization is left entirely to the reader.) The serious or ironic expression of contradictory values requires a correspondent aesthetic bearing.

IV.2. The Heroes' Struggles/ The Problem of Consciousness

Antinomy: "Contradiction between inferences or principles that seem equally necessary and reasonable"⁵

The problems of consciousness in the two novels are analogous. Jakob deals with the same mutually-exclusive aims as Karl (individuality vs. collective unity, freedom vs. service). Walser's hero, as indicated in IV.1., is permitted to ironically "overstate" his predicament in the diary as in his lifestyle, as befits his character. The determinant ideas and positions are conceived as radically and imaginatively as possible, resulting in an extremely polarized narrative structure. Karl, as stated, acts and thinks within a more "realistic" (day-to-day) framework. Some examples make the nature of the parallels clear.

Amerika

Karl feels a vague attraction to the stoker and feels despondence at losing him.

Karl hopes to find a job; he dislikes the informal relationships he finds at Pollunder's and considers Robinson's and Delamarche's vagabond existence to be worthless.

Karl is willing to sacrifice personal interests for his firm. As a

Jakob von Gunten

Jakob glorifies Kraus as a demigod and later actively mourns his departure.

Jakob purposely enrolls in a servants school. He rejects his brother's circle, happily dons the institutional uniform, and goes so far as to denounce consciousness and his own "I".

Jakob immerses himself in such duties, which are actually intended to

lift-boy he carries out his duties with great devotion, but never feels really satisfied.

Karl respects his uncle, but hopes to please and gain his confidence after he has already left him.

As an employee of the hotel, Karl feels at home in the shoving masses of a downtown department store.

The instances listed above reflect the heroes' desires for collective unity and to serve; others suggest more a longing for individuality and freedom.

Karl leaves his European home due to outer circumstances; in his weaker moments he wishes to return. He values his parent's photograph and the suitcase very much.

Karl reacts to the formalistic relationships at his uncle's by playing music, remembering old times, gazing at the traffic, etc.

Karl entertains vague hopes of realizing the good life in the United States, and neither affirms nor denies the illusion of freedom.

subjugate the individual. Although his predicament is never solved, he knows how to appreciate the sense of inner unity achieved through an extreme passivity and selflessness.

Jakob is not just intrigued by Benjamenta, but acknowledges a super-human attraction to the man.

As a pupil in the institute, Jakob romanticizes the same anonymity and confusion he had also condemned earlier.

Jakob leaves home willingly and insists that the separation be complete. He refuses to write his parents, although he does consider himself an heir of the family pride.

Jakob responds to the formalistic relationships at the school by exploring the city; meeting his brother, sleeping with a prostitute, dreaming, etc.

Jakob imagines himself as a millionaire, a general, and as a foot-soldier under Napoleon: he conceives an ultimate freedom, but strictly in terms of dreams.

Karl preserves a sort of inner freedom because he never trusts or confides in people; he never says what he thinks. This has an isolating effect; he is a loner.

Jakob intentionally plays roles and pretends to feel the opposite of what he really does. He is also alone, but attains his goal (Benjamin's friendship) through this very sort of mystification.

The concept of antithesis is essential in understanding the ambivalence of consciousness. Jakob and Karl can never feel really satisfied with what they have. What is missing is obviously the complement to each finite conception or concrete situation, which would unite the dualistic poles of their struggles. While Karl does not realize that his needs exclude each other, Jakob resorts to irony and, furthermore, purposely glorifies and attempts to articulate the "negative" absolute, that essentially also guides Karl in his struggle. (It is "negative" because whatever is definite or tangible is never considered satisfactory.) The value of the fact that Kafka and Walser attempt to pinpoint the elusive sense of loss characteristic of artistic expression at the beginning of this century with similar methods should not be undervalued, although the differences may not be overlooked.

Obviously we can not engage in a thorough psychoanalytical comparison of Kafka's and Walser's heroes at this point, but some important analogies should be evident. An association between struggle and abnormal personality is made most pointedly in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes": the "I" can not interact normally with others and the self is stratified. He is most helpless when consciousness is expanded. In Amerika we find a less apparent link, but similar manifestations. Karl can not relate well with others and especially with women, he tends to misinterpret events to his disadvantage (paranoia), and all natural perceptive processes are disrupted (compare pp. 35-37 above). In Jakob von Gunten the connections are also somewhat vague. Jakob exhibits childlike fixations. He is not interested in women; his memories are dominated by images of his mother. He subordinates his own personality and is overly obsequious. Jakob's "childish" personality is, however, a direct function of the ideals he pursues,

ideals which become more important to him than conventional values. He is aware of the qualities he embodies. (He often wants to become "small" and "worthless".) Kafka, however, endeavors to describe the paradoxical nature of his heroes' struggles in detail, thereby applying a consequential psychology to illustrate its negative effects on various unrelated aspects of day-to-day existence. (Karl does not want to be isolated, have no friends, etc.) Although both desire to become part of a collective, Karl (like his predecessor in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes") hopes to acquire a social position; Jakob not.

Yet it would be false to claim, as Karl Pestalozzi does, that in Walser's work (unlike Kafka's), the existential problem would be ignored or pretended to be solved.

In der Erkenntnis [. . .] liegt der erste Ansatz zu einer künftigen Überwindung des Erkannten. Bei Walser steht an der Stelle der Antinomie ein Dualismus. Es gilt für das Individuum, dadurch zu einem wahren Allgemeinen zu gelangen, daß es sich den bestehenden falschen Allgemeinheiten entzieht. Seine Helden verschwinden, die Kafkas kämpfen. Bei Walser kann es augenblickliche Lösungen geben, bei Kafka nur Verstrickungen. Walsers Dichtungen sind der Ort des Verschwindens und damit, Gelegenheit des Vergnügens, die Kafkas sind Beschreibungen eines Kampfes, die der Erkenntnis dienen sollen. [. . .] In seinen Dichtungen mußte Kafka jene Lösungen in Frage stellen, die ihn als Leser so entzückten. In seinem gegenwärtigen Zustand war ihm Walser ein Trost, für die Zukunft der Welt mußte ein anderes Licht gefunden werden.⁶

Pestalozzi proposes to distinguish Kafka's and Walser's work with the opposite designations "Erkenntnis" and "Vergnügen". In IV.1. we show that Kafka does indeed deal with a problem ignored by Walser: the relationship between subjective cognition and objective "fact". It might be said that while Kafka attempts to find and express the truth, Walser is looking for his truth. This does not, however, make for an overriding distinction, since both writers still deal, as shown directly above, with the same existential conflicts. Jakob's struggle is as serious, ambivalent, and inconclusive as Karl's. Jakob's irony is as much an expression of despair as of lightheartedness. The plot of Jakob von Gunten revolves around a character, who is trying to grasp and accept those realities which determine his existential situation. It therefore involves "Erkenntnis". Although we have still to compare the endings of the novels, it should be clear that

the meaning of Jakob's "Verschwinden" is too ambiguous to be considered as a "Lösung"--and not that different from Karl's disappearance into the "Nature Theatre". Walser's novel is thus far more than the highly ironized "Ort des Verschwindens". It is difficult to understand why Walser would have been a "Trost" for Kafka, when Walser's "solution" occurs in something as nebulous as a dream; and his hero finds that artistic expression is itself no longer tenable--he gives up writing.

We can also not concur with Otto Best, who fails to point out that Jakob is not the personification of a single principle.

Kraus figuriert [. . .] als komplementäre Figur zu Jakob: der Hingabe an das Allgemeine, an das universelle Gesetz, wenn wir es unter Berufung auf Kafka so nennen dürfen, steht der Aufbruch ins Individuelle gegenüber. Kraus gegen Jakob, ein Dualismus, der jenem von Amt und Person entspricht und Franz Kafka, zu dessen Lektüre Jakob von Gunten gehörte, besonders berührt haben mag.⁷

Although Best's understanding of Kraus is correct, Jakob himself does not personify "individuality". He desires it, but also accepts (without irony) the absolution of the self near the end of the book (compare p. 65 above). After Kraus has departed from the institute, Jakob is completely serious in stating that: "Mit Kraus war die Hälfte des Lebens gegangen." (483) Jakob's "Aufbruch" with Benjamenta is prefigured in terms of a servant/master relationship (see p. 78 above). Were the ending of Walser's novel as Best assumes it, Jakob's problem would be resolved. Both Jakob and Karl remain "Verschollene".

IV.3. The Individual and Society

Karl's and Jakob's predicaments have similar roots. They refuse (knowingly or not) to compromise their ideals with the outstanding social norms. They become outsiders. They are essentially 19th Century individuals, who can not find substantial, viable social roles that would correspond to their needs and values. Kafka and Walser thereby successfully delineate their heroes's perceptions of society as something that has become intangible in form and autonomous in its functions. They purposely overlook traditional socio-political themes.

The novels--as well as the heroes' struggles--commence as these central figures enter a modern city for the first time and cease as they are leaving one. These cities appear to almost completely permeate the spectrum of events. Nature appears either dead and inorganic, or is absent. Jakob and Karl observe little that would normally be viewed as characteristic of their environs (well-known parks, avenues, buildings, restaurants, stores, etc.), but rather perceive unstable and palpable movement. The cities resemble dominant collectives, which possess no definable attributes in their eyes. Both being newcomers to the city, they are bound by the sensation of having been left behind in time. Jakob expressly equates the crisis of individuality with the age in which he lives, repeatedly referring to the integral community of his childhood. Karl suffers because he constantly seeks to apply European standards in new situations, also recalling the old order of home. Both discover that their previous educations are useless. Both have access to high society (Karl through his uncle, Jakob through his brother), but in each case feel more in their element as servants.

The Benjamenta Institute and the Hotel Occidental embody the complex and enigmatic character of the modern condition in their inner and outer forms. Although the institute does not actually represent the "world", the positive function it (half-ironically) has for Jakob reflects directly onto the cultural edifice. The bureaucratic autonomy of "society" becomes evident in the school's purposeless laws and in the hotel's mysterious hierarchy of waiters and porters. Kraus would be well-suited for place in the hotel machinery!⁸ In each case there is no real governing head, Benjamenta having withdrawn into his rooms, clocks and bells regulating the activity in the hotel. Categorical knowledge is considered worthless at the hotel's "information desk"; the school's only lesson and textbook teach unreflected subordination. These institutions are supremely impersonal and anti-individual in conception, their functions being monotonous and unknowable, certainly absurd in their perpetuation.

It is striking that Karl only gains some sort of insight into the paradoxical truth depicted in Kafka's parables at those times when he has

fallen far below the social norm. (As Karl loses his job at the hotel, he enters the porter's office; as he is still without employment and wanders the streets of Ramses, he discovers the Nature Theatre.) Jakob's entire plan is, of course, founded on his confinement to a school for servants. His "fulfillment" at the end of the novel precludes, as with Karl, a severance from bourgeois standards. Both authors thus clearly state the antipathetic nature of the heroes' aesthetic and existential (social) needs. The endings of the novels could only be considered "optimistic" if one ignores the fact that in both cases complete breaks with society are taking place.

This sketch of the socially-critical motifs in the novels (there are none in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes") reveals many parallels. Yet more than in almost any other literary works, we sense the impossibility of a final distinction between form and content. What is narrated for its own sake and what to depict the heroes' attitudes? The nature of the relationship between individual and society in these books is, in the end, extremely equivocal. Kafka suggests again and again that Karl is projecting emotional states onto his surroundings, that he tends to blame the world for his own shortcomings. It never becomes completely clear whether the social order is corrupt, or if Karl himself is just a misfit. Walser definitely seems more straightforward in this respect, but less so when it comes to clarifying his regard for individualism. Jakob is only being half ironic when he avows the school. He makes both positive and negative appraisals of the modern era in various contexts. Thus both authors are anything except dogmatic when it comes to judging the century they live in. We find it impossible to draw a comprehensive picture regarding the problem of social criticism, because neither Kafka nor Walser made it their purpose to formulate generalizations or, indeed, any sort of pragmatic doctrine in their works.

IV.4. The Problem of Language

The "how" of Kafka's and Walser's writing is as significant as the "what" of their subject matter.⁹ They both introduce characters to function ei-

-ther as narrators or as a medium for narration. In depicting problematic cognitive processes, it is not surprising that they would mistrust the empirical associations conveyed by traditional imagery and style, by prevailing grammatical-syntactic forms of language.¹⁰

The problem of language is dealt with thematically in Jakob von Gunten and "Beschreibung eines Kampfes" (see especially pp. 16-17 and pp. 77-78 above). Both "I"s express the sensation that words are inherently incapable of touching the essence of matter or ideas. They also associate consciousness with language, i.e. imply a dependency. Jakob's refusal to write is paralleled by his mistrust of reflective thought; the "fat man"'s neglect of the "Dinge" brings about his annihilation.

The principle of contrast dominates almost all grammatical structures in the two novels. Overly complex and exacting elements are coupled with extremely ambiguous and vague ones, so that nothing is given inherent meaning and nothing is really clarified, except (paradoxically) the limitations of language and knowledge.

On the one hand, both authors tend to exaggerate statements, but also to delimit them to the point of making incomprehensible distinctions, so that adjectives are sometimes actually conflicting--or almost synonymous in meaning. Absurd qualifications and restrictions hardly explicate, as would seem to be intended. They occasionally resort to the parataxis or to "negative" delineations when a concept seems particularly elusive, or even let "x" be both "y" and "-y". Metaphoric structures are correspondingly more enigmatic than enlightening. Incongruent variables are paired again and again to create conceptual paradoxes (compare p. 47 and pp. 76-77 above). Walser and Kafka thereby have a propensity to write lengthy sentences distinguished by an excess of commas, qualifying appositions, participial phrases, and relative clauses. Subjects, verbs, and objects are characteristically reversed or isolated. Kafka's use of the hypotaxis is, to be sure, far more extensive and precise than Walser's; it is the rule rather than the exception. That Walser often writes "run-on" sentences, whose parts are bound more through semi-random association

than logic, makes a fundamental stylistic contrariety apparent.

Conversely, perspective restriction (Kafka) and interjective expression of doubt (Walser) is common. Walser inclines towards "non-literary" phrasology throughout his novel; Kafka does the same in the dialogues, but otherwise favours inexplicit, "neutral" vocabulary, especially when depicting critical scenes or important structures. It is, in fact, Kafka's controlled and thoroughgoing usage of key nouns (e.g. porter, servant, room, door, corridor, telephone, "Weg", etc.), which, by virtue of repetition, permeates several passages with more than one level of meaning. This becomes obvious either in single sentences or in structures like the hotel and Nature Theatre. Karl's viewing of the personnel and their confusing duties seems to model a more general, universal situation (compare pp. 40-42 and 49-50 above). Walser's intellectual unpretentiousness remains an experiment with language, a "destruction" of patterned and meaningless syntax and expression. He uses language to parody rather than symbolize. The school, for instance, holds a purely socially-critical function, while Kafka's buildings--although obviously modern creations--can also be viewed from psychological and cognitive, even religious and existential viewpoints. In these ways Kafka and Walser narrate realistically, "doch so, daß die gesamte Choreographie tieferer Sinnbezüglichkeit deutlich wird." (Wolf Wondratscheck)

IV.5. Conclusion

Given the complexity of the material under discussion, the question of a direct "influence" of Walser on Kafka becomes negligible. Walser treated problems, which Kafka had himself tried to solve in "Beschreibung eines Kampfes".

Walser's narrative methods in his diary-novel resemble those Kafka used in his first story more closely than those he developed in Amerika. Walser does not consider the problem of cognition--i.e. the relationship between impression and "fact"--to be important. But the way they both use language and irony to delineate the borders of rational thought, and the

way these are associated with the ambivalent processes of consciousness is unique. Kafka's characteristically strict and consequential use of the parataxis and "neutral" vocabulary is, however, not found in any of Walser's work. He maintains allegiance to a personal truth, while Kafka avows an absolute. Yet both Jakob and Karl are heroes because they never accept a finite determination of being or a definite conception of "reality". They want to fulfill individual and social needs, in doing so they avow a "negative" philosophy, and as a result become outsiders. The structuring of their struggles is analogous, as are the reasons given for their alienation. Most striking is the implementation of narrative and stylistic ambiguity for thematic ends. But, although Walser is abtruse, we do not find the truly ambiguous constructions in his work, that have confounded Kafka's critics for half a century.

Amerika and Jakob von Gunten display reversals from the optimistic rationalism of the classical "Bildungsroman" (e.g. Goethe's Wilhelm Meister). Education is meaningless in these novels because such would presuppose a generally accepted ideal and choices between good and bad. The impermeable, paradoxical qualities given to the Hotel Occidental and the Institute Benjamenta make the impossibility of viable interplay between cultural values and the individual personality evident. It is striking that both novels are repetitious in the sense that no real development is possible for the heroes. Karl is shoved aside while looking at the Statue of Liberty in Chapter one. This event models all successive action. Jakob ironically states that he will be a "Nichts" in later life during the first entry. Like Karl, he can only progress in that he realizes and accepts the seriousness of his condition. No positive formation of character or intellect occurs in either novel.

Karl joins the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma and Jakob departs for a desert. In each case we apprehend just a glimmer of hope, a rough draft of a utopian design. But both novels end before the new "locales" are reached or depicted in concrete terms. The utopia is inaccessible. The theatre and the desert do not represent an absolute "beyond" or "ideal" in the romantic or classical senses, but only make the antipathetic structures of the

heroes' consciousness manifest. Karl's photograph and Jakob's dream (compare p. 51 and p. 78 above) represent paradoxical images that are inconsistent with the laws governing human thought. The possibly ludicrous quality of the theatre is suggested by its advertising methods; the improbability of Jakob's plans by their expression in a dream. Kafka and Walser make their problem, not its solution, a subject for fiction. In doing so, the transcendental idea appears to be purely illusionary, an escape from metaphysical insecurity and social isolation.

Notes

1. Bernard Rang, "Exkurs über Robert Walser", in Deutsche Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert, edited by H. Friedmann and O. Mann (Heidelberg: Rothe Verlag, 1962), p. 104.
2. George Avery, Inquiry and Testament, p. 91.
3. Karl Pestalozzi, "Nachprüfung einer Vorliebe: Franz Kafkas Beziehung zum Werk Robert Walser", p. 334; Christof Schmid, "Robert Walsers 'Geschwätzigkeit'", p. 201.
4. See George Avery, p. 257.
5. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, edited by William Morris (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1969), p. 57.
6. Karl Pestalozzi, pp. 341-43.
7. Otto Best, "Zwei Mal Schule der Körperbeherrschung und drei Schriftsteller", p. 737.
8. Ibid, p. 739.
9. Compare Emil Staiger's interpretation of Heinrich von Kleist's "Das Bettelweib von Locarno" in Interpretationen: Deutsche Erzählungen von Wieland bis Kafka, edited by Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt a. M. and Hamburg: Fischer Bücherei, 1966), especially p. 100.
10. See Richard Brinkmann, Wirklichkeit und Illusion (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1966), pp. 328-31:

"Die Dinge entziehen sich der Aussage, die Sprache vermag sie nicht mehr zu fassen. Sie werden zu 'unrealistischen' und doch intensiv wirklichen Wesenheiten mit eigenem Anspruch, dem der Mensch überhaupt und im besonderen der Dichter sich nicht mehr gewachsen fühlt. Eine eigentümliche Verlorenheit und Ortslosigkeit in dieser entfremdeten Welt kennzeichnet seine Lage. [. . .] Die alten, überlieferten 'empirischen' Zusammenhänge und Beziehungen, die in den gewohnten und allzu vertrauten grammatisch-syntaktischen Formen der Sprache erstarrten, werden als Hindernis empfunden, weil sie als festgefügt, erstarrter Ausdruck eines vergangenen, nicht mehr vollziehbaren Verhältnisses zur Wirklichkeit die neue, unmittelbar erlebte 'Wirklichkeit' verstellen und ihre Aussage verfälschen."

A Selected Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

- Kafka, Franz. Beschreibung eines Kampfes: die zwei Fassungen. Ed. Max Brod and Ludwig Dietz. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 1969.
- . Briefe. Ed. Max Brod. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 1958.
- . Gesammelte Schriften. Ed. Max Brod. New York: Schocken Books, 1935ff.
- Mann, Thomas. Der Tod in Venedig. Frankfurt a. M. and Hamburg: Fischer Bücherei, 1958.
- Walser, Robert. Das Gesamtwerk. Ed. Jochen Greven. Genf and Hamburg: Kossodo Verlag, 1966ff.

2. Secondary Sources

- Avery, George. Inquiry and Testament. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1968.
- Baur, Wolfgang. Sprache und Existenz, Studien zum Spätwerk Robert Walsers. Göttingen: Alfred Kümmerle Verlag, 1974.
- Beißner, Friedrich. Der Erzähler Franz Kafka, Ein Vortrag. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1952.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Robert Walser". Schriften. Volume II. Ed. Th. Adorno and Gretel Adorno. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955.
- Bense, Max. Die Theorie Kafkas. Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1952.
- Best, Otto. "Zwei Mal Schule der Körperbeherrschung und drei Schriftsteller". Modern Language Notes, 85 (1970), 727-741.
- Beutner, Barbara. Die Bildsprache Franz Kafkas. Munich: Fink Verlag, 1973.
- Bezzel, Christoph. Natur bei Kafka, Studien zur Ästhetik des poetischen Zeichens. Nürnberg: Verlag Hans Carl, 1964.
- Binder, Hartmut. Kafka Kommentar zu sämtlichen Erzählungen. Munich: Winkler Verlag, 1975.
- . Motiv und Gestaltung bei Franz Kafka. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1966.
- Bridgwater, Patrick. Kafka and Nietzsche. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1974.
- Brinkmann, Richard. Wirklichkeit und Illusion. Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1966.

- Brod, Max. Streitbares Leben. Munich: Kindler Verlag, 1960.
- Camus, Albert. "L'Espoir et l'Absurde dans l'Oeuvre de Franz Kafka".
Essais. Ed. R. Quillot and L. Faucon. Bruges: Bibliothèque de la
Pléiade, 1965.
- Emrich, Wilhelm. "Die Bilderwelt Franz Kafkas". Protest und Verheißung,
Studien zur klassischen und modernen Dichtung. Frankfurt a. M.:
Athenäum Verlag, 1962.
- . Franz Kafka. Frankfurt a. M. and Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1970.
- Fietz, Lothar. "Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Deutung von Kafkas Schloß-
Roman". Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Wissenschaft und Geistes-
geschichte, 37 (1963), 70-76.
- Frenzel, Herbert and Elisabeth. Daten deutscher Dichtung. Cologne and
Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1953.
- Fülleborn, Ulrich. "Zum Verhältnis von Perspektivismus und Parabolik in
der Dichtung Kafkas". Wissenschaft als Dialog: Festschrift für Wolf-
dietrich Rasch. Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1969.
- Graevenitz, Gerhart von. Die Setzung des Subjekts. Tübingen: Niemeyer
Verlag, 1973.
- Grenz, Dagmar. Die Romane Robert Walsers. Munich: Fink Verlag, 1974.
- Greven, Jochen. Existenz, Welt und reines Sein im Werk Robert Walsers.
Cologne: Klekamp Verlag, 1960.
- . "Wiederkehr eines Verschollenen: Robert Walser". Literatur und
Kritik, 9/10 (1966), 72-75.
- Hehlmann, Wilhelm. Wörterbuch der Psychologie. Stuttgart: Kröner Ver-
lag, 1965.
- Heller, Peter. "On not Understanding Kafka". German Quarterly, 47 (May
1974), 373-93.
- Herzog, Urs. Robert Walsers Poetik: Literatur und soziale Entfremdung.
Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1974.
- Hillmann, Heinz. Franz Kafka, Dichtungstheorie und Dichtungsgestalt.
Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1973.
- Holderegger, Hans. Robert Walser: Eine Persönlichkeitsanalyse anhand
seiner drei Berliner Romane. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1973.
- Horst, Karl August. Anatomy and Trends of 20th Century German Literature.
Translated by Elizabeth Thompson. Munich: Nymphenburger Verlags-
anstalt, 1964.

- Janouch, Gustav. Gespräche mit Kafka. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 1951.
- Jürgens, Martin. Robert Walser, Die Krise der Darstellbarkeit. Kronberg: Taunus Verlag, 1973.
- Just, Klaus Günther. Von der Gründerzeit bis zur Gegenwart. Volume IV. Bern and Munich. Francke Verlag, 1973.
- Kaufmann, Herbert. "The Narrative Structure in Robert Walser's Geschwister Tanner, Der Gehülfe and Jakob von Gunten." Diss. New York Univ., 1969.
- Kobs, Jörgen. Kafka: Untersuchungen zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten. Bad Homburg: Athenäum Verlag, 1970.
- Kraft, Herbert. Kafka: Wirklichkeit und Perspektive. Bebenhausen: Rotsch Verlag, 1972.
- Kudszus, Winifried. "Erzählhaltung und Zeitverschiebung in Kafkas Prozeß und Schloß". Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Wissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte, 38 (1964), 192-205.
- Lämmert, Eberhard. Bauformen des Erzählens. Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1955/ 1967.
- Loose, Gerhard. Franz Kafka und Amerika. Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann Verlag, 1968.
- Martini, Fritz. Deutsche Literaturgeschichte, Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1968.
- , "Franz Kafka, Das Schloß". Das Wagnis der Sprache. Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1954.
- Müsil, Robert. Review of Betrachtung, by Franz Kafka (Leipzig: Ernst Rowohlt Verlag, 1913). Die Neue Rundschau, 2 (1914), 1169-70.
- Nagel, Bert. Franz Kafka, Aspekte zur Interpretation und Wertung. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1974.
- Naguib, Nagi. Robert Walser, Entwurf einer Bewußtseinsstruktur. Munich: Fink Verlag, 1970.
- Pestalozzi, Karl. "Nachprüfung einer Vorliebe: Franz Kafkas Beziehung zum Werk Robert Walsers". Akzente (1966), 322-344.
- Philippi, Klaus-Peter. Reflexion und Wirklichkeit: Untersuchungen zu Kafkas Roman Das Schloß. Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1966.
- , "Robert Walser, Jakob von Gunten". Provokation und Idylle. Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1971, pp. 51-70.

- Piniel, Gerhard. "Robert Walsers Roman Jakob von Gunten". Schweizer Monatshefte, 43 (1963), 1175-86.
- Politzer, Heinz. Franz Kafka, der Künstler. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 1965.
- Pongs, Hermann. Franz Kafka, Dichter des Labyrinths. Heidelberg: Rothe Verlag, 1960.
- Ramm, Klaus. Reduktion als Erzählprinzip bei Kafka. Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum Verlag, 1971.
- Rang, Bernard. "Exkurs über Robert Walser". Deutsche Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert. Ed. H. Friedmann and O. Mann. Heidelberg: Rothe Verlag, 1962, pp. 100-14.
- Reiss, Hans. Franz Kafka, Eine Betrachtung seines Werkes. Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1952.
- Rodewald, Dierk. Robert Walsers Prosa--Versuch einer Strukturanalyse. Bad Homburg, Berlin, and Zurich: Gehlen Verlag, 1970.
- Rolleston, James. Kafka's Narrative Theater. University Park: The Penn. State Univ. Press, 1974.
- Ruf, Urs. Franz Kafka, Das Dilemma der Söhne. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1974.
- Ryan, Judith. "Die zwei Fassungen der 'Beschreibung eines Kampfes'". Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft, 14 (1970), 546-572.
- Schmid, Christof. "Robert Walsers 'Geschwätzigkeit'". Schweizer Monatshefte, 52 (1972), pp. 199-204.
- Schmidt, Heinrich and Schischkoff, Georgi. Philosophisches Wörterbuch. Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1965.
- Sokel, Walter. Franz Kafka, Tragik und Ironie. Munich and Vienna: Langen & Müller Verlag, 1964.
- Staiger, Emil. "Das Bettelweib von Locarno". Interpretationen: Deutsche Erzählungen von Wieland bis Kafka. Ed. Jost Schillemeit. Frankfurt a. M. and Hamburg: Fischer Bücherei, 1966, pp. 87-100.
- Strebel, Felix. Das Ironische in Robert Walsers Prosa. Zurich: Juris Verlag, 1974.
- Thalmann, Jörg. Wege zu Kafka, Eine Interpretation des Amerikaromans. Frauenfeld and Stuttgart: Huber Verlag, 1966.

- Wagenbach, Klaus. Franz Kafka, Eine Biographie seiner Jugend 1883-1912. Bern: Francke Verlag, 1958.
- Waidson, H. M. In Modern German Literature, A Library of Literary Criticism. Volume II. Ed. Agnes Domandi. New York: Ungar Publishing Company, 1972, p. 331.
- Walser, Martin. Beschreibung einer Form, Versuch über Franz Kafka. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1961.
- Wiese, Benno von. "Franz Kafka, ein Hungerkünstler". Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka. Düsseldorf: Bagel Verlag, 1962, pp. 318-35.
- Wöllner, Günter. E.T.A. Hoffmann und Franz Kafka, Von der 'fortgeführten Metapher' zum 'sinnlichen Paradox'. Bern and Stuttgart: Haupt Verlag, 1971.
- Wondratschek, Wolf. "Weder Schrei noch Lächeln". Text und Kritik, 12 (1966), 17-21.