

# FRANZ KAFKA

## Anthology of Marxist Criticism

Edited and translated by KENNETH HUGHES



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IN MEMORIAM

Gwyneth Bodycombe-Hughes

John Bodycombe Hughes

*O'r pridd y doetham er praw,  
i'r pridd ydd awn, er pruddaw.*

## PREFACE

I have compiled this anthology for a number of reasons. First, Marxist criticism of Kafka is not well known in the West. Although a good deal has appeared in German during the past twenty years, it has been noticed only by the relatively small circle of Kafka specialists who follow the literature in German: in the numerous anthologies of Kafka criticism that have appeared in the United States, and that have translated some German work, one searches in vain for Marxist viewpoints on Kafka.<sup>1</sup> And even among those specialists who have read the German Marxist material, there is only a handful who are aware of the work done in the Soviet Union. As recently as 1974, one editor of an American anthology was capable of asserting that "from one corner of the globe to the other there is hardly a major language or literary culture that is without Kafka translations or commentaries (Russian is the one notable exception)."<sup>2</sup> Yet, as the selections in this anthology make clear, the debate about Kafka started in major Soviet literary journals as early as 1959, and he was translated and anthologized in the Soviet Union during the sixties: apparently, not only are Western critics unaware of the content of the Soviet material, they are unaware even of its existence. In his essay in this volume, Ernst Fischer calls for an East-West dialogue on Kafka's work, and that is

1. *The Kafka Problem*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: New Directions, 1946); *Kafka: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ronald Gray (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962); *Franz Kafka Today*, ed. Angel Flores and Homer Swander (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Castle": A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter F. Neumeyer (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969); *New Views of Franz Kafka*, ed. Kenneth McRobbie, *Mosaic*, 3 (1970), No. 4; *The Problem of "The Judgment,"* ed. Angel Flores (New York: Gordian, 1976); *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Trial": A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. James Rolleston (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976); *Franz Kafka: A Collection of Criticism*, ed. Leo Hamalian (New York: McGraw-Hill, n.d.); *The Kafka Debate*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Gordian, 1977). Of the 161 essays presented in these collections, I would say that only about five of them either approach Kafka from Marxist perspectives or deal with him in the context of Marxist literary theory. One must remember that, as the writers presented here frequently mention, Marxist occupation with Kafka began relatively recently.

2. Hamalian, p. 146.

certainly a worthy goal. But the Eastern material must first be made as available in the West as Western criticism is in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and that is one of the aims of this collection.

Another is to dispel the mistaken notion that there is some sort of uniform and monolithic Marxist literary criticism forever lockstepped into an unswerving and undifferentiated ideology. This curious misconception is no doubt based partly on "honest" ignorance, but it is also partly a tenacious survival of the conscious distortions inherent in the cultural politics of the cold war, and as such it has persisted into the present—despite the fact that the West is fully aware of the debate between the "dogmatists" and the "revisionists." The truth is, however, that there is as much disagreement—and agreement—among Marxists as there is among bourgeois critics, and for bourgeois writers to refer to "Marxist" critics in general is just as indiscriminating as it is for Marxists to speak of "bourgeois" criticism *en gros*. This is why I have not attempted to define what I understand to be Marxist criticism. Perhaps what unites all the essays presented here, and what characterizes them as Marxist in their fundamental concerns, is their commitment to the argument that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."<sup>3</sup> If that position is as basic to Marxist views as it seems to be, then it is appropriate that a picture of Marxist criticism be allowed to emerge from the selections presented here, rather than that their inclusion be justified by reference to a preconceived definition. In this regard, there is a clear advantage to an anthology of Marxist criticism centered around a single author, as opposed to a more general collection of essays dealing with a variety of writers. If in a given Marxist collection Joyce and Proust are rejected and Steinbeck and Thomas Mann accepted, that is enlightening, but it does not afford the reader nearly as good an opportunity to appreciate the divergence of Marxist opinions in a more focused debate, from various sides, around the work of a single writer.

A third aim of this anthology is more specifically pedagogical. The view that it is necessary to include Marxist perspectives in our literary criticism has been gaining ground rapidly—and not merely for the reason that such a vast part of the world's population currently lives

3. Karl Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*, ed. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1973), p. 85.

in societies predicated on Marxist principles (although that in itself is surely a compelling reason), but because of the growing conviction that Marxists have something important to say to us. This is reflected in the recent appearance of several anthologies of Marxist literary criticism.<sup>4</sup> But the usefulness of such collections in dealing with comprehensive problems of literary criticism and theory is distinctly limited, especially in the college and university curriculum: to read literary criticism is a frustrating exercise to people who are not familiar with the literature under discussion, and one can hardly presuppose a general acquaintance with the majority of primary works discussed in those anthologies. In fact, the idea for this volume came from practical experience that I have had over several years in teaching a seminar on "applied" literary criticism. The problem was how to enable students to read as many diverse methodologies of criticism as possible and yet to ensure that they were familiar with the literature being criticized. The solution I devised was to construct the course around Kafka, whose central oeuvre, so far as it is not already known to the students, is compact enough to be read in the first few weeks of a semester, and who has been treated from every conceivable critical angle, all of which but the Marxist were represented by readily available work in English. To fill that gap, I started translating German, Russian, and French material for my students, and this anthology is an extension of that effort.

It will be apparent that, in the selection of these essays out of the huge body of Kafka criticism, I have striven toward a principle of mutual illumination and commentary in order to communicate the sense of the very real debate, argument, and polemic in which these Marxist critics are engaged. I have purposely given the Soviets more room—not because I am convinced of their greater merit, but because their work is the least accessible and least known. Thus the very important views of Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin, without which no picture of the Marxist reception of Kafka is complete, are not included here because they have been readily available in English for some time and are therefore among the few Marxist evaluations of

4. Such as *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism*, ed. Berel Lang and Forrest Williams (New York: McKay, 1972); *Preserve and Create: Essays in Marxist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gaylord C. LeRoy and Ursula Beitz (New York: Humanities Press, 1973); *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology*, ed. David Craig (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975); and *Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in America and the Literary Tradition*, ed. Norman Rudich (Palo Alto, Calif.: Ramparts Press, 1976).

Kafka that have been taken into account by Western critics.<sup>5</sup> I have not limited the selections to passages that are particularly and characteristically "Marxist" in the antagonistic, bourgeois sense of the term, for that would have been to distort the concerns of Marxist criticism. Although it is true that the concentrated article on the aesthetic specifics of a single work is not a highly developed critical tradition in the Soviet Union—for ideological and historical reasons—Marxist critics regularly work also with the "text"; but perhaps it is precisely in their refusal to limit themselves to an "intrinsic" explication that their Marxism is most apparent. Nor have I sought to eliminate occasional repetitions, which are the bane of all anthologies; most of what I have deleted is material familiar in the West, such as biographical information and some of the better known quotations from Kafka's works. There is, of course, much more of this in the Soviet criticism than in the Western essays, because there Kafka was being introduced to a readership which knew relatively little about him. I have also attempted not to tamper with terminology or phraseology at any point; that these selections are relatively free of jargon is a fact that may surprise some readers, but it is a reflection of the texts themselves and not a product of the editor's hand.

The order of the selections is roughly chronological and divides naturally into "initial positions," that is, those taken before the Prague conference in 1963, those assumed at that meeting, and the subsequent Soviet reaction. The major exception is Boris Suchkov's essay, which I have placed out of order at the beginning of the Soviet reaction because it is the most comprehensive Soviet treatment of Kafka to date, and because the other contributions are therefore best read against that background.

Apart from Howard Fast's short piece, a version of Hannah Arendt's essay, and the selections from Avner Zis and Yuri Barabash, none of the material here has, to my knowledge, ever before appeared in English. As mentioned, all translations are my own. Since the majority of Russian names referred to is already familiar to the Western reader, I have retained the traditional style of transliteration throughout. Titles, deletions, and notes in brackets are mine; non-bracketed titles, ellipses, and notes are those of the authors.

5. Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); "Franz Kafka" and "Some Reflections on Kafka" in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 111-40 and 141-45, resp.

## INTRODUCTION

Probably no writer has more extensively and more deeply divided Marxist literary scholarship and criticism than Franz Kafka. Although Marxist appraisals of other modernists, such as Proust and Joyce, also sharply diverge, it is Kafka who, in terms of the sheer amount of attention that has been paid to him and in terms of the substantive ideological debates that have crystallized around discussions of his works, has replaced Balzac and Tolstoy and has become the literary watershed of contemporary Marxist opinion. There are obvious historical reasons for this: Kafka's work was becoming known at the same time that the quasi-official Communist aesthetic of socialist realism was being promulgated as an authoritative standard and model in the Soviet Union. Andrey Zhdanov's insistence, at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, on the primacy of that new concept as "the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism"<sup>1</sup> was bound to evoke sharp debate, especially in view of the vigorous creative and theoretical ferment which had characterized the Russian literary sphere at least since 1905. Since Kafka was in many ways the most fascinating and enigmatic new star on the horizon, he was naturally used as an example in the arguments that ensued. Moreover, the most significant Communist literary theoreticians of the time, Georg Lukács and Bertolt Brecht, not surprisingly based their theories on the literature most familiar to them, and they were naturally more closely tied to the German literary heritage from which Kafka came than to any other.

But there is more involved: Kafka deals much more directly than most writers with the kinds of alienation that become institutionalized in the capitalist social order on the one hand and in bureaucratic governmental hierarchies in general on the other, and his work is thus a two-edged sword which can be used both to dissect the specific evils of capitalism and to lacerate the vestiges of alienation which, in the

1. Quoted by Abram Tertz [i.e., Andrey Sinyavsky], *On Socialist Realism* (New York: Pantheon, 1960), p. 24.

opinion of some of these critics, still persist in socialist societies. This sounds much more like a political point than a literary one, but of course it is impossible, in the Marxist view, to separate aesthetics and politics, which are interdependent ideological phenomena. This is the crux of Kafka's particular divisiveness in the Marxist debate: more than that of other modernists, Kafka's literary work has lent itself to exploitation in the literary-unspecific ideological struggle between the dogmatists and the revisionists. As the Soviet scholar G. I. Safronov has polemically put it, in reference to Kafka and his positive assessment by certain Yugoslav critics, "the persistent attempts of the revisionists [. . .] to depreciate all the realistic classics in favor of modernism, to discredit the classical heritage, testify to the fact that it is not only a matter of literary questions, but also of an ideological and aesthetic struggle."<sup>2</sup> It is only in this context that the passion and heat generated by the Marxist discussion of Kafka can be understood, and only against this background that one can accurately evaluate the significance of such events as the Prague conference on Kafka in 1963, in which, as I have said elsewhere, "alienation was the issue; Kafka was the catalyst."<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, there are many questions. Is Kafka an "anti-realist," as he appears generally in the Soviet view and specifically in Zatonsky's phrase, or is he a "huge, monumental realist," as Alexej Kusák calls him? (And, indeed, what is realism?) Is his work relatively devoid of content and therefore merely a decadent display of empty formalism, or does it in fact capture a specific and characteristic content of our time? Is Kafka a "poet of alienation," as some writers presented here call him, and, if so, in what sense; that is, did he succumb to and accept alienation as an inevitable human condition, as the Soviets tend to believe, or is it not rather that, in Garaudy's words, he "awakens in people the consciousness of their alienation" and thereby implies an alternative? (Is Fischer correct in his contention that it is not the artist's responsibility to provide answers; or are the Soviets right when they imply that it is the artist's responsibility at least to suggest alternatives?) In general, did Kafka create a kind of existentialist "everyman" in his heroes, or was he aware that these were the representative

2. G. I. Safronov, "Rodstvenny li idealy F. Kafki i R. Domanovicha?" ["Are the Ideals of F. Kafka and R. Domanovich Related?"] *Vestnik Leningradskogo Universiteta: Seriya Istorii, Yazyka i Literatury*, No. 14 (1963), pp. 54-63.

3. Kenneth Hughes, "The Marxist Debate, 1963" in *The Kafka Debate*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Gordian, 1977), p. 52.

products of a transitory and alterable historical stage? These and similar substantive questions are directed specifically to Kafka's works, but they imply and exemplify broader questions of critical method and social interpretation, which are never divorced in Marxist considerations: To what extent can Kafka's work be explained as the product of his social environment and to what extent is it aesthetically "autotelic," to use Paul Reimann's term? When the writer is most individual and subjective, is he therefore conversely least social and objective—or concomitantly *most* social and objective? Is alienation solely a product of capitalist society, which has been overcome in socialist society (and does Kafka therefore have nothing to say to the socialist world, apart from providing a little historical local color), or does alienation in fact persist in socialist society (and can Kafka therefore teach even socialists something)? The issues are doggedly complex, and like all complex issues, they give rise to abundant ironies. The complexities and ironies were underlined by Roman Karst when he pointed out that even in the Soviet Union the situation is basically so paradoxical that the excellently translated and edited Soviet Kafka anthology of 1965 is perhaps the only published collection of any writer's works prefaced with an introduction attempting to convince the prospective reader that he would be wasting his time if he actually went ahead and read the works collected.<sup>4</sup>

In view of this situation, it is clearly impossible, in the scope of an introduction to this volume, to discuss all the aspects of the debate, and in the following only some of the major questions, such as realism and decadence and their attendant secondary issues can be discussed.

Realism is a central touchstone in the Marxist evaluation of literature and of all art. It is through realism that the art work can most immediately exercise its cognitive function, an aspect that Marxists always insist on in contrast to the conception of art as entertainment and ludic distraction, which sometimes appears in bourgeois views. In general, realism implies a faithfulness to the accurate representation of the objective social reality that surrounds us and in which we live our daily lives—"truth of detail," as Engels put it in his famous formulation.<sup>5</sup> Thus Howard Fast insists that in "The Metamorphosis," "the

4. Roman Karst, "Kafka and the Russians" in *Perspectives and Personalities: Studies in Modern German Literature Honoring Claude Hill*, ed. Ralph Ley, et al. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1978), p. 186.

5. *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art: A Selection of Writings*, ed. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1973), p. 114.

equation of man and cockroach is a [. . .] confusion and distortion of the objective reality"—for truth to zoological detail must convince us that man and cockroach are wholly separate and unequatable species. Fast's extreme reductionism would banish metaphor and simile altogether from the realm of realist art, but few Marxists have been that extreme. Most have, however, insisted that realism is characterized by the artist's concentration on man in his social context, by the examination of man and society *together*, in their mutual relations. Dmitri Zatonksy maintains in "The Death and Birth of Franz Kafka" that Kafka cannot be considered a realist, for his extremely pessimistic view of man does not comprehend the optimism and the faith in the future that objectively is also an important part of our reality, and he argues in "Kafka Unretouched" that Kafka's tendency to exaggerate things to the point of absurdity is tantamount to a "de-realization" of reality. And Knipovich believes that Kafka's "metaphysical absurdity" leads him to concentrate on unimportant aspects of reality, which also disqualifies him as a realist. Similarly, Boris Suchkov asserts that in *America* (which he and some others call *Lost Without a Trace* [*Der Verschollene*], in keeping with Kafka's original title) the fantastic elements gain the upper hand and finally overwhelm what may have started out as a relatively realistic presentation, and the result is that, disregarding "truth of detail," Kafka simply grafted his view of European conditions onto his fanciful idea of America and that the body of the work was right in rejecting the transplant. Moreover, the court in *The Trial*, he says, cannot be sufficiently correlated to anything actually existent and amounts to nothing more than an incomprehensible reality. Thus Kafka can never be included in the company of the great realists such as Gorky, Thomas Mann, Rolland, Hemingway, and so forth.

Another implication of realism is that the work of art contains a certain basic "content," a minimum of features, which we can identify as composing important parts of our socially shared reality. This "richness of content" (*soderzhatel'nost'*) is insisted upon, especially by Soviet critics, because it is a particularly important vehicle for the cognitive function of art.<sup>6</sup> Suchkov maintains that the aesthetic influ-

6. One must remember too that the Soviet critics approach Kafka and modernism in general from the point of view of the great realistic content of the nineteenth-century Russian novel, especially of Tolstoy, a tradition which reaches into the twentieth century in such writers as Sholokhov.

ence of literature on the reader is constituted as much by this "richness of content" as it is by the "strictly aesthetic properties" of the work. The social contexts of our lives, the "details" of reality to which the writer is enjoined to be true, are so extremely rich and various that they must be palpably present in any work which aspires to be a realistic representation. Suchkov finds Kafka's work to be generally lacking in such detail: the content, he says, is not definitive because the motivations behind the action are not clear; Kafka's portrayal of reality is "monotonous" because it is "limited to the twilight side of life." Conversely, Kafka's characteristic narrative form, the parable, is so extremely ambiguous and "polyvalent" that it amounts to a virtual lack of content (*bessoderzhatel'nost'*), that is, to a lack of incidents that reflect identifiable experiences in our normal lives. Jiří Hájek, on the other hand, views Kafka's parables as "infinitely saturated with reality."

Clearly, the solution to this problem lies in the definition of reality. It would be most unfair to tax the Soviet critics with having failed to define what they mean by reality—they have done so no more vigorously than anyone else—but it is true that they have not been so scrupulous in meeting this problem, at least in their views on Kafka and art, as some other Marxists have. Roger Garaudy has adopted an extremely elusive position: all art partakes of reality; therefore, all art is realistic; therefore, Kafka too is a realist. There is an undeniable persuasiveness in the logical progression: nothing can come from nothing; reality is all there is for something to come from; all art therefore comes from reality. But the syllogism breaks down in its intended conclusion: that all art is therefore realistic in any specific and serviceable use of the term. Garaudy's endeavor to loosen the circumscribed constraints on "realism" is understandable and perhaps even honorable, but in allowing the concept to expand beyond any limits at all, he has deprived it of any usefulness, and he has been roundly castigated for this.<sup>7</sup>

More helpful are considerations based on the Marxist view of reality itself. The fundamental premise of both philosophical and historical Marxism, the *sine qua non* of its existence altogether, is the perception that reality is dialectical, that the only thing stable is flux and

7. Most sharply by Hachik Momjan, head of the Department of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy of the Academy of Social Sciences of the USSR, in his *Marxism and the Renegade Garaudy* (Moscow: Progress, 1974).

the only permanent phenomenon is change. Fischer has used this foundation to argue that, since reality itself is constantly developing in a process of perpetual self-sublation (*Selbstaufhebung*), any definition of realism is perpetually provisional and open. If I may paraphrase Marx to capture his meaning: It is not the definition of realism that determines its appearance, but rather the appearance of realism that determines its definition—with the understanding that Fischer does not, like Garaudy, have an infinitely expandable view of what is realistic.

There are others, such as Alexej Kusák, who have maintained that since reality really *does* change, new forms really *are* needed to capture the new realities. Thus he argues that Kafka is *more* realistic for having used forms that are not traditionally associated with realism (based, as that usually has been, on traditional reality) and that Lukács, say, is therefore in gross error when he applies the criteria of nineteenth-century critical realism to Kafka in order to find him wanting in realism. Jiří Hájek similarly claims that *America* is not more realistic than *The Trial* or *The Castle* simply because it contains more of the social documentation and commentary common to critical realism than the other two novels do. Lukács' conservative effort to petrify realism in its nineteenth-century forms, and specifically to lionize Thomas Mann at Kafka's expense,<sup>8</sup> was persuasively met by Brecht, who argued that "one cannot take the form of one single realist (or of several) and call it *the* realist form. This is not realism. Otherwise one comes to the conclusion that *either* Swift and Aristophanes *or* Balzac and Tolstoy were realists."<sup>9</sup>

The opposite of realism has been called a number of things by Marxists, but, as realism implies not only an artistic method but also the world view which that method expresses, the best term for its opposite would seem to be "decadence," which similarly implies both world view and artistic method. Both Zatonsky ("Remarks on Kafka's Journals") and Barabash point to this opposition, the latter citing

8. Lukács' unswerving, and sometimes apparently irrational, allegiance to Thomas Mann has been called "one of the most remarkable critic-author relationships in modern German literature." See Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Georg Lukács, Thomas Mann and the Modern Novel" in *Thomas Mann in Context: Papers of the Clark University Centennial Colloquium*, ed. Kenneth Hughes (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University Press, 1978), p. 37.

9. Quoted by Werner Mittenzwei, "The Brecht-Lukács Debate" in *Preserve and Create: Essays in Marxist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gaylord C. Leroy and Ursula Beitz (New York: Humanities Press, 1973), p. 112.

Horst Redeker's view that realism and decadence exist in an inverse ratio: when realism declines, it is decadence that gains ground, and vice-versa. The most characteristic phenomenon of decadence in the literary work is an excessive attention to artistic form at the expense of content, that is, "formalism."

The relation of content and form is a fundamental problem in Marxist aesthetics, one we can only touch on here. The Marxist critic is committed to viewing form and content as coexisting in an indissoluble dialectical unity, namely, the work itself. However, in analyzing the way in which the economic base exercises its influence on the superstructural phenomenon of art, most Marxists, including Marx and Engels themselves, have concentrated on the aspect of content. Stefan Morawski is unquestionably right in calling the aesthetics of Marx and Engels a *Gehaltästhetik*.<sup>10</sup> But that is not necessarily true of Marxist aesthetics as a whole. The fact that the concept of "form" seems somehow less concrete, less palpable—in a word, less "materialistic" and therefore more "idealistic"—than "content" has led some aestheticians into the belief that Marxist aesthetics as a whole is a *Gehaltästhetik*, that the base exercises its influence on the form of art (as the relatively "idealist" aspect) primarily through the vehicle of content (which is seen as the relatively "materialist" aspect). Thus Henri Arvon writes that "Marxist esthetics, which considers the work of art to be intimately related to social life as a whole, is left no choice with regard to the relation between content and form. It is forced to admit the priority of content, which then creates the need for an appropriate form."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Terry Eagleton states that "Marxist criticism [. . .] wants to assert in the end the primacy of content in determining form."<sup>12</sup> Such arguments do not seem to confront fully the fact that the base, as well as conditioning the contents of our lives and art, also conditions their form; in a dialectical view, there is perhaps less reason than has generally been thought to assign so exclusively to content the role of mediator between base and artistic form. This is not to excuse the excesses of formalism, either in art or critical method, whose view of form is indeed idealistic, as it is largely detached from the conditioning factors of the base. There is, of course,

10. *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*, p. 18.

11. Henri Arvon, *Marxist Esthetics*, trans. Helen Lane (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 41.

12. Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 23.

an alternative line of Marxist aesthetics which has posited that it is in fact form that is "the truly social element in literature"<sup>13</sup> and that has borne its best fruit in the "genetic structuralism" of Lucien Goldmann, which is genetic and structural in the sense that Goldmann is interested in investigating the sociohistorical genesis of structures of thought that determine the structures and forms of literature.

In any case, those critics who charge Kafka with a lack of "richness of content" therefore simultaneously chide him for what they see as the formalism of his work. Thus Suchkov states that Kafka's parables are an appropriate form in which to clothe his peculiarly ambiguous contents, for they are rather bloodless "constructions," and he argues that "the polyvalent character of Kafka's symbolism turns out to be a lack of full content and turns into a purely formal-logical structure." In general, what is objected to as formalism in Kafka's work is his devices of "de-realizing" (Zatonsky) reality, two of which are most frequently commented on. One is the "encoding" into "chiffres" or "hieroglyphs" that the Soviets point to. The implication is that Kafka, not having really very much to say, essentially played a formalist game with his readers by creating a kind of code that is left to his readers to break or "de-code"—rather than operating in the more conventional and comprehensible tradition of the symbol, which is always grounded in concrete reality. This interpretation is repudiated by many critics, including Hájek, who insists that Kafka's creative method is not a gratuitous encoding, but that it is absolutely necessary as a device to destroy the pseudoconcrete (a point to which we shall return below).

The second device putatively inimical to realism is Kafka's use of the fantastic, which, according to Suchkov, overwhelms whatever realistic elements might be in the fiction, especially in *America* and *The Castle*. Neither he nor other Soviets have anything against the fantastic per se. He specifically credits fantasy as "a means of analyzing reality"—provided that it be used cautiously. The Romantics, he says, who also created "phantasmagorical works which largely scorn external verisimilitude," were careful not to "cut the threads which united their creations with the maternal soil of reality," and so in their works one can still recognize "the contours of the real world and its authentic conflicts." But in Kafka, he believes, the fantastic

13. Georg Lukács, *The Evolution of Modern Drama*, quoted in Eagleton, p. 20.

becomes excessively formalist, whereas it is only “the freedom of fantasy from formalization” which “opens a space for true creativity and understanding of the world.” Zatonsky (“Kafka and Problems of Modernism”) comes to a similar conclusion when he compares “The Metamorphosis” not with a Romantic work, but with H. G. Wells’s short story “The Man Who Could Work Miracles.” Ernst Fischer implies, however, that the Soviet point is ahistorical: the Romantics, with the fine anticipatory antennae peculiar to writers, felt the shudder of dehumanization, of reification, and captured their feeling in the marionettes, automata, and other fantastic phenomena of which they were so fond. But Kafka, he maintains, was the first to feel such things in the *everyday*—and that surely implies an historical difference.

It seems to me that Alexej Kusák has very accurately defined the situation when he says with only apparent paradox, that Kafka had to use a relatively “de-realized” form of the parable in order to “grasp more reality, because he was a greater realist than those who castigate him.” And Hájek too maintains that Kafka’s fantastic elements are not gratuitous, but a means of encompassing a greater reality. Both Kusák and Hájek refer to Karel Kosík’s concept of the “destruction of the pseudoconcrete” in this regard, and Hájek quotes the relevant passage: the everyday world is *not* the one we know best, precisely because it is everyday, because of its “intimately fetishized familiarity”; in order to *see* it—not simply to *recognize* it—we must gain distance from it, it must be divested of its quality of “*seeming* known” through a fictional device similar to Brecht’s principle of the “alienation effect” in drama. It is not entirely accidental that this point should have been voiced so strongly by three Czech writers, but it is also not unique to recent Czech criticism. The Cultural Theory Panel of the Central Committee of the Socialist Workers’ Party of Hungary has also admitted the usefulness of the kind of estrangement which Kafka has been criticized for: “socialist realism does not exclude, it even presupposes a certain aesthetic abstraction which serves the better recognition of the essential reality and which therefore always maintains a functional connection with it.”<sup>14</sup>

“Artistic device,” “estrangement,” “seeing” as opposed to mere “recognizing”—such terminology necessarily recalls critical categories of Russian Formalism, and an interesting, if somewhat peripheral, as-

14. “Of Socialist Realism” in *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, ed. Lee Baxandall (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), p. 263.