

The Search for Meaning and the Conundrum of Authority in the Castle

Kenneth K. Lee^a, David Ross^a

Franz Kafka's deliberation on the nature of authority in *The Castle* leads to the conclusion that though authority cannot be escaped, authority fosters communalism and facilitates interpersonal communication. Kafka's titular Castle is an impenetrable, oftentimes nonsensical authority, but its inefficient bureaucracy does not lessen its power and instead strengthens it. Under its influence, K. undertakes a religious enterprise towards accepting the impenetrability of authority.

Keywords: Kafka; The Castle; bureaucracy; bourgeoisie; authority; language

Though never officially inducted into any philosophy, Franz Kafka is popularly regarded as an absurdist author. His writing depicts the absurdity of the world and its various impossibilities—the attempt to conform to society, the attempt to search for meaning in life, the attempt to escape from an omnipresent authority that oversees all within an impossible world. This article analyzes *The Castle* to explore Kafka's ultimate acceptance of absurdity. Though Kafka's first novel *Amerika* is chronologically followed by *The Trial*, *The Castle* reads as the natural sequel to *Amerika*. In *The Trial*, Joseph K. encounters the persecution of a strange authority, but he remains in familiar surroundings. In *Amerika*, Karl is denied that luxury and exiled to a foreign land where he must learn the lay of the land and the ways of the people; likewise, K., the protagonist of *The Castle*, finds himself in a new world whose laws are unfamiliar to him, and his task as Land-Surveyor is to map the village ruled by the Castle. In *Amerika*, the ship and the Hotel Occidental are possible prototypes of the Castle, symbols of the impenetrable authority that Kafka sought to understand. But while Karl flees from both conflicts, K. resolves to stay in the village under the thrall of the Castle: "I can't go away. I came here to stay. I'll stay here" (p. 180). Most tellingly, K. states that, rather than choosing not to leave, he lacks the ability to leave. By the time he wrote *The Castle*, Kafka had realized the omnipresence of authority, the need to face obligation, and the error of escapism. Having established the impossibility of escaping conflict, Kafka knew the value of having K., the spiritual successor to Karl, remain under the sway of the Castle. Where *Amerika* depicts escape from authority, *The Castle* depicts submission to authority, exploring how authority simultaneously demeans and promotes dignity in a collective humanity. The titular Castle is an inscrutable authority whose confusing methods, perpetrated by an inefficient bureaucracy, rule over the bourgeois society of the village. *The Castle* is the "essential adventure of a soul in quest of its grace" (Camus, 1955, p.129); K.'s quest for meaning enters both the theological and patriarchal spheres as he attempts to penetrate the godliness of the Castle by reaching a single official, Klammer, a father figure with whom he competes and whom he seeks to understand; and all the while, K. interacts with the villagers, forming relationships and becoming deeply involved in the community, an exploration of the social sphere unique to *The Castle*. While he seeks the domestic stability of a career and home, K. continues his search for meaning, a goal shared by the other villagers and dependent upon the Castle. Communication is the key to understanding, depicting both the weakness of language and the dignity of discourse as every character shares his or her own, usually

conflicting, interpretation of the Castle. But Kafka shows that there is meaning to discourse. Meaning becomes intertwined with self and community rather than being an entirely external locus found in the Castle. In the search for meaning, therefore, Kafka advocates communion under authority.

Purpose of the Castle and Bureaucracy

What is the Castle? Throughout the novel, the Castle, an authority sacred and beyond the earthliness of the village, serves as an apparent source of meaning, but it is unclear what imbues the Castle with sanctity and meaning: What gives meaning to meaning? Its bureaucratic nature aside, the Castle exhibits inherent meaning that the characters of the novel instinctively understand. In the opening lines, Kafka describes the Castle as being present even in its absence: "The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there" (p.3). This description suggests the Castle's secrecy and distance from its subjects, but despite the darkness, K. knows to gaze into the "illusory emptiness above him" (p.3). Perhaps the Castle inhabits an illusion of emptiness, and K. knows its presence regardless, or the Castle is part of the emptiness, and its very authority is an illusion. When he observes the Castle in the morning, K. sees "the Castle above him, clearly defined in the glittering air, its outline made still more definite by the thin layer of snow covering everything" (p.11). Despite its modest appearance as "a rambling pile consisting of innumerable small buildings closely packed together and of one or two stories," the Castle momentarily "satisfies" K.'s expectations (p.11). When he approaches it, K. becomes disappointed at the "wretched-looking town, a huddle of village houses, whose sole merit, if any, lay in being built of stone" (p.12). But despite its appearance, the Castle remains a source of power and authority. Walter Corbella (2007) notes that the Castle occupies a central position in the village, a "vantage point from which control and authority can be established" and that defines "the hierarchical division between the *gentlemen* and their social inferiors" (p.70). K. compares it to his hometown, the church tower of which is "firm in line, soaring unflinching to its tapering point," but ultimately an "earthly building" (p.12). It lies defined in relation to the human community, and because of its earthliness, lacks holiness. In comparison, the Castle possesses windows that glitter "with a somewhat maniacal glitter" and battlements that are "irregular, broken, fumbling, as if designed by the trembling or careless hand of a child...as if a melancholy-mad tenant...had burst through the roof and lifted himself up to the gaze of the world" (p.12). This "melancholy-mad tenant" is the authority lying outside human

a. Department of English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, 27599

limits. It is free and inscrutable, “maniacal” in its irrationality and imperceptibility, but due to such traits, authority transcends humanity and embodies its sense of meaning.

From the beginning, the Castle assumes religious connotations through its all-encompassing nature. It is omnipresent, simultaneously assimilating its subjects within its boundaries and disseminating its sanctity to its subjects. Schwarzer tells K., “This village belongs to the Castle, and whoever lives here or passes the night here does so, in a manner of speaking, in the Castle itself” (p.4), and likewise, the teacher says, “There is no difference between the peasantry and the Castle” (p.14). Most obviously, the villagers are part of the Castle, but conversely, the Castle must be part of the villagers. Perhaps what imbues the Castle with meaning and authority is the very people over whom it rules, the people who trust in the authority of the Castle and therefore give it control. Kafka explores another converse relationship between authority and subject when K. negotiates the terms of his employment after the Mayor has requested that the teacher hire K. Though the teacher is doing K. a favor by giving him work, K. states that “when one is compelled to take someone else on, and this someone else allows himself to be taken on, then he is the one who grants the favor” (p.124). For the teacher to gain authority over him, K. must accept the post. Similarly, the Castle owes its authority to those who imbue it with authority. Corbella observes that “power does not emanate from a single individual or site, but in the multiple interactions between the villagers and the authorities” (p.78). This is not to suggest that the Castle possesses no inherent authority; Kafka, through his observation of absolute relationships like that between father and son, certainly believed that unconditional authority exists—but not independently of humanity. Without subjects to validate it, authority would be obsolete. Similarly, Klamm does not need to assert his power over K., but he needs K. to have power. As Ron Smetana (1986) observes, the power of the Castle is “diffused through the entire village population” (p.47). The Castle needs the villagers just as the villagers need it.

Like Kafka, K. firmly believes in the absurd authority of the Castle and the “ludicrous bungling that in certain circumstances may decide the life of a human being” (p.82), but the stone-and-mortar Castle cannot be equated with metaphysical meaning. Corbella distinguishes the function of the Castle as a physical and a symbolic structure. What is observed as the physical form of the Castle is a construction that denotes the efforts of the social enterprise to understand meaning, the invisible authority symbolized by the Castle. When he observes the Castle, K. attempts to capture its authority, but the Castle’s outward appearance, while indicative of authority, is not the authority. Authority cannot be seen, but it is always present. Even when it disappears from K.’s range of vision, the Castle is felt, which “serves as indication of its illusory nature” (Corbella, 2007, p.71). Before his meeting with the Mayor, K. notes that meeting with the authorities is not difficult, but that all these authorities do is “guard the distant and invisible interests of distant and invisible masters” (p.74). When he speaks of authorities here, K. means the bureaucracy of the Castle, while the absolute authority that Kafka is primarily concerned with is the “distant and invisible master” symbolized by, but ultimately lying beyond, the Castle. K. also states that he fights “not only for himself, but clearly for other powers as well which he did not know” (p.75). It seems unlikely that K. is under the compulsion of some

secondary authority in conflict with the Castle. Instead, K. is fulfilling his duty of piety towards authority by questioning and seeking to understand it; K.’s conflict with authority is a form of submission, in which K. forgoes “an unofficial, totally unrecognized, troubled, and alien existence” in favor of vigilance towards authority and being “always on his guard” (p.75). Kafka did not write to escape or conquer authority, but to understand his submission. Similarly, K. says, “I don’t want any act of favor from the Castle, but my rights” (p.96). Never does K. desire freedom from the Castle. His desire for “rights” suggests willingness to submit, reflecting Kafka’s rejection of romantic autonomy. Kafka’s struggle was for dignity, not liberation; K. muses that “through too great compliance he would only become the teacher’s slave and scapegoat” (p.199), but K. still obeys the teacher as he does the Castle. Kafka was concerned with balancing self and obligation, and to that end, he felt the need to sanction authority. Likewise, K. continues his investigation of the Castle and seeks to learn its secrets.

Even the internal structure of the Castle belies its true authority. Villagers who have visited the Castle include K.’s assistants Arthur and Jeremiah, who were sent to him by the Castle, and Barnabas, the messenger who brings letters from Klamm. Barnabas’s account of the Castle indicates that even inside, there are barriers: “Is it really Castle service Barnabas is doing, we ask ourselves then; granted, he goes into the offices, but are the offices part of the real Castle?” (p.228). Because of the barriers put up by the “physical” Castle, it is unclear what constitutes the “real” Castle, the absolute authority. People create systems that are increasingly refined and self-enclosed until that system no longer speaks to reality, and in *The Castle*, that system, the tool to comprehend the meaning of authority, is the form and bureaucracy of the Castle. As Corbella argues, the physicality of the Castle “matters to the villagers insofar as it represents the control without bounds that permeates their lives,” but the symbolic power of the Castle “resides primarily in their minds” (p.72). Contact between the villagers and the Castle is facilitated by the bureaucracy—the officials and their servants—but the hierarchy is incomprehensible, the bureaucracy seems to do little of worth, and the Castle never exercises its supposed power and authority. Though K. is fixated on Klamm and views him as the ultimate authority representing the Castle, Klamm is only a single official. Servants of the Castle, who stay at the Herenhoff Inn, are “ruled by their insatiable impulses” (p.285) and described by Frieda, the barmaid and Klamm’s mistress, as “contemptible and objectionable creatures” (p.51). The Castle is seemingly incompetent and incapable of recognizing its own incompetence. In explaining the workings of the Castle, the Mayor tells K. that his employment as Land-Surveyor was an accident of bureaucratic confusion. When K. decries the error, the Mayor responds: “Errors don’t happen, and even when once in a while an error does happen, as in your case, who can say finally that it’s an error?” (p.84). Errors are only apparent, and affairs are settled “justly, yet all the same arbitrarily” (p.88). The Castle is made up of unexplainable paradoxes, and the officials’ activities seem to serve no purpose.

But for all its seeming faults and even its tyrannical nature—officials are middle-aged and brusque, and servants are often sexually promiscuous—the Castle is not depicted as something to be overthrown. Kafka suggests that though authority appears irrational and inconsistent, humanity may simply be unable to comprehend an existing internal logic.

Barnabas's sister, Olga, describes the chaotic method of the officials traveling between the village and the Castle: "There are several roads to the Castle. At one time one of them is in fashion, and most carriages go by that; then it's another and everything drives pell-mell there. And what governs this change of fashion has never yet been found out" (p.280). Olga suggests that, because some unknown law "governs" the change, the only impediment to knowing the path of the officials is the obscurity of law. Any observed inconsistency stems from ignorance of a system that is beyond humanity. Most likely, Kafka did not believe humanity could comprehend the higher truth of authority, and it is unclear whether he believed that humanity should do so, even if it were capable. Comprehension might heighten dignity, but it would also negate the benefits of submission by mitigating struggle. If humanity understood its workings, authority would not be a true authority, disproving the existence of higher truth. K. muses: "If an authority is good, why should it not be feared?" (p.239). True authority ought to be feared, and to be feared, it must remain beyond the ken of its subjects. Villagers unconditionally accept the authority of the Castle, never distinguishing between the officials and the Castle. Gardena, the landlady of the Bridge Inn, tells K. that "Herr Klamm is a gentleman from the Castle, and that in itself, without considering Klamm's position there at all, means that he is of very high rank" (p.63). If his position were clarified, Klamm's stature would be reduced. His powerful presence stems from K.'s ignorance about him. Inscrutability, Kafka suggests, is what gives authority power.

Kafka shows the futility of the attempt to define authority, but simultaneously, he shows the value of the attempt as the only chance for even a possibility of understanding—that there is meaning in pursuing an impossible duty. K. is no different from the villagers in his obsession with and reverence for the Castle, never questioning the power of the authorities, but he continues his attempt to penetrate the Castle. K. responds to Gardena that though he does not presume he will be able to "face Klamm without a door between [them]" and supposes that he may "run from the room at the very sight of him," he insists on speaking to Klamm, as fear is "no valid reason in [his] eyes for refraining from the attempt" (p.65). K. starkly contrasts with Karl, who fled from this challenge; K. realizes that he is ignorant but never wavers in his quest for understanding, being "prepared to put up with [his] ignorance...so long as [his] strength holds out" (p.73). While K. is more aggressive in his attempts, other villagers share his line of thinking. Regarding her dismissal from Klamm, Gardena says that she was "entitled to inquire...but had no right to be unhappy" (p.106). Like K., Gardena had once been inquisitive about the Castle, and nothing suggests that this has changed. In comparison, her more mellow stance implies that failing to meet Klamm is to be expected. Gardena says that if there is no chance of meeting Klamm, K. "won't alter that fact by means of this protocol" (p.148), but that through the protocols of the Castle, K. possesses "a sort of connection perhaps with Klamm" (p.149). Even that minimal connection is a meaningful victory; K. insists that anything less of a direct meeting is failure, but Kafka's humility—even self-deprecation—suggests that his view was more in line with that of Gardena. K.'s presumes that failing to meet Klamm is utter failure, disregarding the existence of "tiny, vanishing, actually invisible hope" (p.147). But his inquisitiveness is not wrong,

and, as will be discussed, every villager similarly inquires into the Castle. When K. learns of Barnabas's frustration at his uncertain position in the Castle, K. states that "something is there, something which Barnabas has the chance of using, something or other at the very least; and that it is Barnabas's own fault if he can't get any farther than doubt and anxiety and despair" (p.240). K.'s disapproval stems from Barnabas's inaction. In *Amerika*, Karl is the only prospective employee of the Oklahoma Theatre willing to go deep into the racetrack in search of the management; but Barnabas, like the dawdling bystanders, allows doubt to stop him, something that Kafka deems negligence of duty. Kafka's stance was that "one must fight to get to the top...one must take advantage of everything that offers any hope" (p.210). Pursuing any form of hope amid subjugation, as K. does, is the most dignified way to live. What K. must correct is his flawed perception of hope, which the following section further explores through the father-son dynamic.

Father-Son Mimetic Rivalry

René Girard, whose work in anthropological philosophy introduced the theory of mimetic desire, provides a possible interpretation of the father-son rivalry that pervades *The Castle*. According to his theory of mimesis, human beings imitate each other's desires, and this imitation gives rise to rivalries and conflicts; the subject desires an object because he is provoked by the desire of another person, the model, for the same object. Thus, there is always a triangular relationship of subject, model, and object, which can develop into mimetic rivalry between subject and model for the desired object. Applied to Kafkian father-son dynamics, the son is the subject who develops a rivalry with the father, the model, over some object. When he steals Frieda away from Klamm, K. competes directly with the authoritative father figure, *pace* the Freudian Oedipal complex, for reasons other than sexual desire. Before learning that Frieda is Klamm's mistress, K. competes with Frieda as fellow subjects of the Castle, and his words are meant as "a weapon for bringing down her pride" (p.48). As evidenced by Frieda's wording when she asks K. if he wants to "take [her] away from Klamm" (p.50), K. does not want Frieda for her own sake, but only because of her connection to Klamm. Note that other villagers consider sexual affairs with officials to be "respectable," as Jeremiah calls Frieda because she is a "former sweetheart of Klamm's" (p.307). K. differs from the villagers in his direct competition with Klamm. In a deleted passage, Gardena claims that Klamm cannot be said to be "sometimes more and sometimes less of an official, for he is always an official, to full capacity" (p.438). Villagers consider Castle officials beyond their reach and therefore beyond competition—Girard calls this phenomenon, in which the subject merely imitates the model, external mediation. However, in internal mediation, the subject and model do not belong to different worlds, and the subject comes to resemble the model so that they desire the same things; because they are in the same world and reach for the same object, they become rivals. K. models internal mediation by believing it possible to reach Klamm and distinguishing Klamm as a "private person" able to be spoken to anywhere, "in a house, in the street, wherever [K.] happens to meet him" (p.112). K.'s attempt to reach Klamm is not purely a quest for understanding, but also a competition. When attempting to win an audience with Klamm, K. describes himself as fighting with the authorities

“for something vitally near to him, for himself, and moreover, at least at the very beginning, on his own initiative, for he was the attacker” (p.75). In *Letter to His Father*, Kafka likewise admits that he attempted to lessen his father Hermann’s power through jokes and considered breaking with him by marrying—Kafka’s early attacks against authority as he competed with Hermann. K. competes with and perhaps even hopes to emerge victorious against Klamm, but his dogmatic attempts to comprehend Klamm, as though K. were an equal with this ultimate authority, are doomed to fail. By engaging in mimetic rivalry as he seeks hope, K. occludes his own quest.

Another example of mimetic rivalry between father and son is the competition between K. and Jeremiah, once again for Frieda. K.’s assistants Jeremiah and Arthur are childlike, climbing through windows, following K. against his wishes, and being chased off with threats. Though seemingly obedient, they both display mimetic tendencies when vying for Frieda’s attention, “jealously” watching her movements with K., trying to sleep with Frieda, and trying to ruin K. “so as to be left alone with [Frieda]” (p.181). When he leaves K., Jeremiah takes Frieda, and he appears to age drastically. Jeremiah explains that when he is alone, “all [his] youthful spirits are gone” (p.302). Jeremiah ages because, having left K. and being outside his authority, Jeremiah becomes a rival. Frieda later asks K.: “Do you think that Jeremiah, so long as he was in service, would have dared to take me away?” (p.323). While Jeremiah was his assistant, K. was an external mediator/model and therefore not a rival, but once dismissed, Jeremiah becomes part of the same world as K. Now they take part in internal mediation, vying for the object of their desires, Frieda. Perhaps K.’s hatred of Jeremiah and Arthur stems, as Jeremiah accuses, from his subconscious fear of displacement, which makes him “afraid of assistants” (p.306). If so, his hatred harkens to “The Judgment,” in which Georg’s father attempts to replace Georg with his friend, a substitute son, to avoid Georg’s displacement of himself as the authority. In that story, also, Georg’s father has a changing appearance like Jeremiah, being frail while under Georg’s power but stronger and taller when asserting his authority over Georg. Changes in physical appearance in accordance to changing metaphysical perception is a hallmark of Kafkian literature, and in *The Castle*, signifies the changing power dynamic between father and son.

Like that of Jeremiah, Klamm’s appearance also changes. He appears differently to each person, whose descriptions fluctuate “in detail...and yet perhaps not so much as Klamm’s real appearance” (p.230). His ever-changing appearance leads Gardena to conclude neither K. nor herself are “even capable of seeing Klamm as he really is” (p.64). Barnabas, too, doubts that “the official who is referred to as Klamm is really Klamm” (p.229). What changes may not be Klamm’s appearance, but perceptions of his image. In this way, Klamm’s appearance depends “on the mood of the observer, on the degree of his excitement, on the countless gradations of hope or despair which are possible for him when he sees Klamm” (p.231). K.’s perception of Klamm as a rival offends the villagers because it challenges their own perspective. Perhaps much more offensive than the difference between themselves, the villagers recognize that K. alone defies external mediation in favor of internal competition. Through Klamm’s inconstancy, Kafka shows the conflict of perspective between individuals, suggesting another theme of *The Castle*: the purpose of discourse, and how authority facilitates communication.

Communication and Language

The Castle is a story of communication and, despite the failings of language, the value of discourse. Despite their shared belief in its absolute authority, each of the villagers has his or her own interpretation of the Castle. Aside from their different perception of Klamm, villagers share with K. varying, often conflicting information about the Castle. Michael Löwy (2004) argues that K. “does not feel called to take up the villagers’ cause or initiate collective action,” and thus his attitude is “strictly individual” (p.54), but Löwy neglects the constant discourse between the villagers and K. Similarly, Corbella states that the world of the Castle “affords no room for the development of emotional ties in the form of companionship or friendship, especially because they disrupt the established order” (p.75), but the Castle seems instead to facilitate companionship. Gardena finds K.’s desire to meet Klamm presumptuous; Olga tells K. that many believe Klamm’s secretary Momus to be Klamm himself; Burgel, a secretary to an official, Friedrich, tells K. that the Castle tends not to judge at night, because judgments become more private. These discussions are a system of communication that binds the village together as a community. Compared to Clara or Brunelda of *Amerika*, the women in *The Castle* are typically less antagonistic. Even Frieda, who beseeches K. to go “to the south of France, or to Spain” to keep her with him (p.180), is only a momentary distraction. In fact, Frieda, like K. and the villagers, searches for meaning: “She was seeking and he was seeking...their tossing limbs did not avail to make them forget, but only reminded them of what they sought” (p.60). Note that in *Amerika*, lust and other earthly desires draw Karl away from conflict; Frieda and K. instead remind one another of their duty to authority. Their physical communion reminds them of their search but is ultimately insufficient; their search is for *spiritual* communion. K.’s quest for admission to the Castle complements his quest for acceptance into the community; K. finds a fiancé in Frieda, then work from the teacher, and lodgings with Barnabas. If Schwarzer is correct that whoever stays in the village stays “in the Castle itself” (p.4), then K.’s two quests are one and the same. By gaining acceptance into the community and shedding the status of foreigner that sets him apart, K. also gains acceptance into the Castle. Klamm writes K. to praise him as a Land-Surveyor, claiming that “the surveying work that [he has] carried out thus far has been appreciated” (p.154). K.’s literal task as Land-Surveyor is to map the village. On a metaphysical level, he explores the village’s customs and beliefs about the Castle, thereby fulfilling this task through communication.

Before discussing the value of communication, it must be noted that Kafka likewise highlights the failings of language. Communication is difficult; K. and the villagers are often at odds because they fail to comprehend one another, particularly because of their different perspectives. Frieda tells K. that Gardena said his “character was so different from ours...that even when [he] spoke frankly, it was bound to be difficult for [them] to believe [him]” (p.201). Paradoxically, communication facilitates understanding, but mutual understanding is needed to facilitate communication. Like all worthwhile endeavors in Kafkian literature, communication is confusing and painstaking. In the opening of the novel, Schwarzer’s call to the Castle to affirm K.’s identity requires that he reach over K. for the telephone that rests almost over his head, so that “he could not, even with the best intentions,

avoid disturbing K.” (p.6). When he himself calls, K. hesitates to give his identity because he is “at the mercy of the telephone...the other could shout him down or hang up the receiver, and that might mean the blocking of a not unimportant way of access” (p.27). When he reveals that calls to the Castle would cause all the instruments in the subordinate departments to ring, if only “practically all the departments didn’t leave their receivers off” (p.94), the Mayor emphasizes that the inscrutability of authority hinders direct communication. K. hands the letter from Klamm to the Mayor, and the Mayor tells him that rather than the Castle validating his role as Land-Surveyor, “the task of proving that [he has been] taken on is laid on [him]” (p.92). Kafka did not believe in convenient answers handed down by providence, choosing instead to participate in the more frustrating path of struggling for answers. “To anyone who knows how to read official communications, and consequently knows still better how to read unofficial letters, all this is only too clear,” says the Mayor. K. responds, “You interpret the letter so well that nothing remains of it but a signature on a blank sheet of paper” (p.92). Language, Kafka claims, is an insufficient system of communication, the subjectivity of language lending itself to misinterpretation and impeding true understanding.

Yet language is the only medium available. Kafka suggests that miscommunication, as another form of endless struggle like submission to authority, has its own merits. K.’s quest largely takes place through discourse with the village community, and miscommunication forces them to continue their attempts. Ongoing conversation about the Castle is fruitful whether or not the ambiguity of authority is ever clarified. In fact, conversation is facilitated by inaccessibility; the lack of an easy catharsis, the impossibility of an end, perpetuates community. Before Olga shares the secret of her sister, Amalia, she says that “complete accord” is needed both for K. to help them and for them to help K. (p.243). It seems impossible to ever reach complete accord, but because of this impossibility, Olga must tell K. the story, which, at least minimally, enriches his understanding of the village and the Castle. Communication is how K. seeks to integrate himself into the community, and the community provides structure to the enterprise of meaning; Kafka, likewise, wrote as a form of communication, and he chose not to break with Hermann because family was the structure in which he could begin to understand him. Thus, Kafka stresses the importance of communal identity in the quest for meaning, and the role of authority is to foster and enforce community. When Pepi, the chambermaid who temporarily replaces Frieda as barmaid at Herenhoff Inn, must return to her original post, she reflects that she is happy to return to the other chambermaids: “Why should I get on better than they do? For that was just what held us together, the fact that the future was barred to all three of us in the same way, and now I have broken through after all and was separated from them” (p.406). As with the masons and workers of “The Great Wall of China,” shared blind subjugation to authority contributes to the communion between Pepi and her friends. K., who seeks to displace Klamm, approaches authority erroneously. To K., understanding means rivalry and mastery, but to Kafka and the villagers, understanding is deference to the quest; reflection, not rivalry, is the proper mode. During an unsuccessful wait for Klamm outside Herenhoff Inn, K. has a moment of seeming enlightenment that

removes him from his competitive quest. In his solitude, K. muses:

It seemed to K. as if at last those people had broken off all relations with him, and as if now in reality he were freer than he had ever been...but—this conviction was at least equally strong—as if at the same time there was nothing more senseless, nothing more hopeless, than this freedom, this waiting, this inviolability. (p.139)

This passage suggests that Kafka, perhaps inspired by Judaism, was drawn to the communal enterprise. Unlike Protestantism, which leans toward individualism in its rejection of papal supremacy, Catholicism and Judaism emphasize community. But Catholicism still incorporates a measure of autonomy; church membership itself is a matter of choice. Judaism takes communal identity further. Jews are born into faith and community. Hannah Arendt (1944) interprets *The Castle* as “the one novel in which Kafka discusses the Jewish problem, the only one in which the hero is plainly a Jew” (p.115). Löwy agrees that K. is a Jewish figure, claiming that K. is an “eternal troublemaker who is always out of place” (p.204). Per this argument, K., ostracized by both the Castle and the village, embodies the “modern would-be assimilationist Jew” seeking recognition (p.116). However, though different from the villagers in his confrontational mindset, K. is not set so far apart from the village community. K. truly does become assimilated into the village, was perhaps assimilated the very moment he stepped within its boundaries. K. himself recognizes the “relations” he possesses within the village, and contrary to Löwy’s claim that K. alone “refuses voluntary servitude” (p.204), K., like the villagers, acknowledges the power of the Castle. Even when he momentarily achieves the freedom that he craves, K. realizes that freedom from authority is meaningless; authority is the source of community and meaning.

Kafka provides an example of an archetypal heroic individual in Amalia, from whom Kafka’s opinion about individualism can be inferred. Like K., Amalia differs from the villagers in her perception of the Castle, but while K. remains obedient even while challenging Klamm, Amalia has altogether rejected the Castle. Though her family used to be in good standing, the village has since ostracized them because Amalia refused the sexual summons of an official, Sortini. Amalia’s individualism emerges with her changed appearance at the Fire Brigade’s celebration, where she attracted Sortini; Olga describes that Amalia’s “somber glance, [which] has kept the same quality since that day, was high over [their] heads” (p.245). The change is not physical—Olga emphasizes that Amalia is not particularly beautiful—but internal, as evidenced by her “somber glance.” Earlier, K. had taken notice of her gaze as well, describing it as “cold, clear, and steady,” and “not hateful but proud and upright in its reserve” (p.219). Amalia has a different understanding of the world than others, including K., which allowed her to reject Sortini. According to Olga, Castle officials are so attractive that “women can’t help loving the officials once they give them any encouragement” (p.256), and K., analogously, is obsessed with Klamm. Though Olga insists that Amalia must love Sortini, or else she “would be too exceptional for plain human understanding” (p.256), Olga is partial to the Castle in a way that Amalia is not. In another example of miscommunication, Olga projects her own viewpoint onto Amalia, and indeed, Olga admits that she

herself would have answered Sortini's summons. Amalia likely feels nothing for Sortini, her understanding of authority leading to utter rejection of both the Castle and its officials. While the villagers consider the Castle an external mediator, and K. treats the Castle as an internal mediator, Amalia seems to forgo mimesis altogether in favor of autonomy. Unlike her fellow citizens, Amalia does not imitate or compete with a model, the Castle, to distinguish her identity. Instead, she takes the road of the romantic heroine and affirms herself as an individual.

But Kafka's depiction of Amalia is unsympathetic. Löwy praises Amalia as "irreducibly [embodying] the refusal to submit, disobedience, in short, human dignity" (p.204), but Amalia's disobedience does not preserve her dignity. She becomes a mute creature unable to connect with the community and, far more than K., the "out of place Jew" that Löwy describes. If the village represents Jewish community, K. becomes, or has always been, part of the community, while Amalia becomes and remains an outsider. Her brand of heroism abandons communal identity and appears rooted in stubbornness and egoism, as Amalia does nothing to help her family even while her actions ruin them. Her freedom is like the momentary release that K. felt—hopeless, senseless, and ultimately meaningless. As Amalia abandons the Castle, the Castle likewise abandons Amalia. No punishment comes, because the Castle no longer recognizes her family. As previously discussed, voluntary submission to authority lends it power and even existence. Amalia and the Castle no longer occupy the same metaphysical order. Before he can be forgiven, Amalia's father has to "prove his guilt" (p.275), an impossibility so long as Amalia does not recognize the Castle. Amalia's family is "punished" instead by the community. Olga describes their father's customers boycotting him and their family friends breaking with them: "We weren't afraid of anything in the future, we were suffering under the immediate present, we were actually enduring our punishment" (p.269). To Kafka, individualism threatens meaning by forgoing communal identity, leading to the worst possible fate—being set adrift, alone, in a meaningless world. Like K., Amalia does not understand that certain duties are owed to authority, that reverence is owed, and that the unbridgeable distance between them, the subjects, and the Castle, the authority, is not permission to displace or break with authority. Camus claims that K.'s interaction with the Barnabas family is his attempt to "recapture God through what negates him, to recognize him, not according to our categories of goodness and beauty, but behind the empty and hideous aspects of his indifference, of his injustice, and of his hatred" (p.133). Indeed, K. begins to diverge from archetypal moral judgments, but Camus argues that to forsake "morality, logic, and intellectual truths" makes K. "a little more exiled" (p.133). However, K.'s abandonment of logic and intellect seems to have the contrary effect of

bringing him closer to the Castle. Amalia clings to morality and logic, rejecting the Castle's absurdity by shredding Sortini's summons. As he accepts the irrational order of the Castle, K. does not become exiled, but integrated.

What ultimately empowers the Castle is its ambiguity, which engenders ongoing communication between the villagers and gives them purpose and solidarity. Many critics note that Willa and Edwin Muir's translation of *The Castle*, the first to be published, employs diction with religious connotations. It seems doubtful that Kafka wrote solely with spiritual motives, but as with all Kafkian literature, *The Castle* incorporates religion into its exploration of authority. Considered a spiritual authority, the Castle provides structure to the villagers' religious enterprise; the community has its own form of religion and congregation, one that Kafka advocates as opposed to individualism. Through community, discourse about the Castle becomes possible—and Kafka suggests human community is every bit as important as the Castle itself.

References

- Arendt, Hannah (1944). "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition." *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 6 (Issue 2), 99-122.
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. (Justin O'Brien, Trans.). Vintage Books, 1955.
- Corbella, Walter (2007). "Panopticism and the Construction of Power in Franz Kafka's 'The Castle'." *Papers on Language & Literature*, Vol. 43 (Issue 1), 68-88.
- Girard, Rene. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Kafka, Franz. *Amerika*. (Willa and Edwin Muir, Trans.). Schocken Books Inc., 1946. (Original work published 1927)
- Kafka, Franz. *The Castle*. (Willa and Edwin Muir, Trans.). Schocken Books Inc., 1946. (Original work published 1926)
- Kafka, Franz. *The Complete Stories*. (Willa and Edwin Muir, Tania and Janes Stern, Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, Trans.). Schocken Books Inc., 1971.
- Kafka, Franz. *Letter to His Father*. (Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, Trans.). Schocken Books Inc., 1966. (Original work published 1952)
- Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. (Willa and Edwin Muir, Trans.). Vintage Books, 2009. (Original work published 1925)
- Löwy, Michael (2004). "Paper Chains: Bureaucratic Despotism and Voluntary Servitude in Franz Kafka's *The Castle*." *Diogenes*. Vol. 51 (Issue 4), 49-58.
- Smetana, Ron (1986). "Kafka's *The Castle*." *Explicator*. Vol. 45 (Issue 1), 47-48.