US-China Foreign Language, June 2019, Vol. 17, No. 6, 287-296
doi:10.17265/1539-8080/2019.06.004

The Outsider in Labyrinth: An Analysis of Kafka's *The Castle*[*]

Zhang Qin

South China Business College, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangdong, China

The openness of Kafka's stories arises from the labyrinth atmosphere in his works, which is the greatest virtue in him. The paper mainly focuses on *The Castle*, and tries to find out what labyrinth Kafka has created in it, through the analysis of his unique writing style: ambiguous setting, unusual narrative angle, and curious use of language. He enhances the aura of labyrinth by picturing the characters, and he not only manages to exclude readers from his inner world, but also creates a system, or circumstance, in which an outsider who keeps searching for a sense of belonging, for the meaning of existence is emerged.

Keywords: Kafka, outsider, labyrinth, *The Castle*

Introduction

The Castle has frequently been treated as a metaphysical essay and an excellent expressionistic novel by Kafka. Sontag Susan in her critical thesis *Against Interpretation* (2001) categorized those interpreters of Kafka's work into three, social allegory, psychoanalytic allegory, and religious allegory. She asserts that the work of Kafka has been subjected to a mass ravishment by no less than these three armies. Apparently, she is reluctant to interpret Kafka in a way that "content" and "form" of one text are separated[1] but tries to dig "behind" the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one, which is what a work of art by definition says ("What X is saying is…," "What X is trying to say is…," "What X said is…", etc.) (Susan, 2001, p. 4).

What is Kafka trying to say? That is a question.

The aim of all commentary of art is to show "how it is what it is" (Susan, 2001, p. 14), even "that it is what it is", rather than to show what it means. We should, as Susan says, "leave the work of art alone" and pay "more attention to form in art" (p. 13).

Keeping to this principle, with respect to Kafka, and considering the openness of Kafka's works, there comes the paper.

The parable labyrinth has inspired a great many authors to make use of it in their own works to mirror an individual's uncertainty and anxiety to the environment. In *The Castle*, Kafka uses unique writing skills to combine precise "realistic" detail with absurdity, careful observation, and reasoning on the part of the

[*] **Acknowledgement:** It is funded by the key program of the English Language and Literature Guangdong Province, 2016.

Zhang Qin, M.A., professor, Department of English Language and Culture, South China Business College, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangdong, China.

[1] According to Sontag, the emphasis on "content"-based art analysis stems from the early mimetic art theories (art as an imitation of reality) which were first meant to be derogatory (Plato) but later defended (Aristotle, art as catharsis). This defense, still based on the mimetic theory, continued the consideration of art as "representing" something (an idea, concept, the content) which had to be explained (interpreted) and hence a separation of content from form.

protagonists with inexplicable obliviousness and carelessness; he organizes the plots together layer upon layer with internal contradiction by portraying the figures. Through his writing style and special text structure, Kafka creates a labyrinth atmosphere which often leads readers into the bewilderment and not-understanding. "No one realized that the book and the labyrinth were one and the same…" (Borges, 1989, p. 96).

Labyrinth in the Text

Kafka's story is a "product of a whimsically intricate, at times perverse fantasy" (Rastalsky, 1997, p. 81).[2] Reading him is never an easy thing. Readers expect to enter the inner world of Kafka himself and to search what he is trying to say but in vain, just like K. in *The Castle* who attempts to enter an unreachable Castle. At least, the situation is somewhat Kafkaesque. Kafka's story is a world as fantastic as a labyrinth, the topography of which, as Sartre notes in his essay on the fantastic[3], is filled with "labyrinths of corridors, doors and stairs that lead to nothing…signposts that lead to nothing.… Innumerable signs that line the road and mean nothing. In the 'topsy-turvy' world, the means is isolated and posed for its own sake" (Olsen, 1986, p. 35).

The story and the labyrinth are one and the same (1989, p. 96) which leaves readers with a sense of confusion about the work, real or imagined for it takes a form of labyrinth. The writing purges of exact time and place. By using unique writing skills, Kafka creates an aura that is enigmatic, and dreamlike just as the structure of it is like a labyrinth and the plots are organized layer upon layer with internal contradiction. The atmosphere is enhanced through the development of the story and portraits of characters.

Jorge Luis Borges is entranced with the idea of labyrinth and he uses it extensively in his works. Many of his short stories and essays were arranged around this. For instance, in *The Garden of Forking Paths*, Borges (1989) presented the idea of a labyrinth "forking in time, not in space…an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times" (p. 96). One fragment extracted from *The Garden of Forking Paths* may help us understand Borges' labyrinth:

> In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. Here, then, is the explanation of the novel's contradictions. (Borges, 1989, p. 98)

The labyrinth is a riddle of geometric proportions and progressions, recreating a multiplicity of events, choices, or solutions. All of Borges' labyrinth-stories establish such a pattern and also be found the parallel expression in the labyrinth that Kafka creates in his stories by using his unique techniques. The paper here intends to explore how Kafka creates such an aura of labyrinth through the following ways:

The Setting

Kafka always describes unrealistic situations in precise and perfectly realistic details so that the scenes seem absurd. The first sentence of *the Metamorphosis*[4], for example, is one of the most famous openings and yet, in one respect, it is remarkably flat, perfectly undramatic, as if such impossible transformation is acceptable for the

---

[2] This phrase is borrowed from Francis Kempf's everyone's darling: Kafka and the critics of his short fiction.

[3] Fantastic, is a literary term refers to a mode of fiction in which the possible and the impossible are confounded so as to leave the reader (and often the narrator and/or central character) with no consistent explanation for the story's strange events. Sometimes erroneously called the Grotesque or Supernatural fiction. Kafka's works also contains fantastic elements.

[4] "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect..." 1972, p. 1.

protagonist. In Kafka's novels before *The Castle*, the heroes still have their own names as Josef K. in *The Trial* and Karl Rossmann in *America*, while in *The Castle*, there is only an initial letter "K.". The author apparently casts a labyrinth atmosphere on the natural and real scenes. And Kafka's story purges of the conventional references to time, place, and proper names in the 19th-century realist narratives. Readers are not told where or when the incident takes place; they have no background information about the narrator. The setting of the whole story is never clearly designated.[5] Time seems to have stopped in this wintry landscape, and nearly all the scenes occur in the dark. The opening chapter is a striking example.

On the first day, the unidentified K. arrived at the village, "the village lay under deep snow" and "there was no sign of the Castle hill, fog and darkness surrounded it, not even the faintest gleam of light suggested the large Castle" (Kafka, 2005, p. 1). In this depiction of environment, there is no clue to the information of the village and the Castle. In the following narration,

> K. stood a long time on the wooded bridge that leads from the main road to the village, gazing upward into the seeming emptiness", the only spots mentioned is the "wooded bridge" and the "main road", except for which are "seeming emptiness. (Kafka, 2005, p. 1)

When K. approaches to the Castle, the depictions are all about its shape and appearance. He encounters a teacher, and they talk directly about the Castle without any. Then, he goes ahead on the road, putting readers in uncertainty of his way of walking and of destination. Then, he steps into the first door open to him through the village...

This part is seen as one of the most bizarre and fascinating scenes. Here, Kafka uses "a woman's hand" instead of a woman, and "an imperious voice" of a tough man. The room is described as "limly lit", "smoke billowed", standing there as if "in the clouds". The name, place, and time are purged in the setting again.

Point of View

The point of view in *The Castle* does not fall neatly into either of these categories. According to the translator's notes that the story origins as a first-person point of view, Kafka changed his mind while working on the third chapter and went back, crossing out each "I" and replacing it with "K.". The story may be told in the third person's point of view, but the narrator does not seem to be omniscient, and he certainly does not stand "outside" his central character. On a number of occasions, he actually takes readers directly into the mind of K. The character's thoughts are reported in the third person's way, but they are rendered in his own idiom.

The tempo of the story charts the state of the central character in much first-person fiction. When K. is anxious, it is choppy. When K. loses himself in the labyrinth of his paranoid logic, it is tortuous and wordy. When the emphasis is on K.'s actions rather than his thoughts, it becomes terse. The stark prose becomes a miracle of precision.

Back to the inn, K. meets two assistants and has a conversation with them. He compares their faces and claims that they are as alike as snakes and would like to call both of them Arthur.

---

[5] In the French Nouveau Roman ("new novel") literary movement of the late 50s, novels and films avoiding conventional narrative structure and character development, they are sometimes called "anti-novels". French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet is one of the advocators and founders of this movement who allude to the influence of Kafka on their work.

It is obvious here that both Arthur and Jeremiah are not K.'s assistants. Later evidence proves them to have been sent by the Castle. The scene also suggests that K. is not expecting any assistant. In just a few lines, K. stresses that the three strangers "must stick together" and the two are not to speak to anyone without K.'s permission. In K.'s saying, it can be recognized his meticulously chiseled logic and his prolixity (there must be wordy explanation to make K.'s unreasonable quests acceptable). Readers can almost hear the tortuous but tough voice from K.

The Castle is largely made up of K.'s endlessly proliferating process of interpretation which becomes an integral part of the novel. This obsession with meaning is most evident in the second chapter, where K. subjects a six-sentence letter from the official Klamm to a probing analysis that would satisfy even the most exacting of New Critics.

Everything is presented from K.'s highly limited angle. Readers have to interpret the apparent hostility of the villagers, the seeming concern of the landlady as they are seen by K. In this case, Kafka's style compels readers to adopt the point of the central figure of the story, since only the reflections on the characters are actually recorded. Kafka leaves it to readers themselves to interpret the words he had spoken. He exhibits ability to narrate in an unusual point of view represents the major feature of his writing, labyrinth.

Language Skills

Many different adjectives can be used to describe the Kafkaesque style. The following long list of epithets is drawn from the brief history of German literature: "tense", "dialectical", "accurate", "exact", "grotesque", "intellectual", "logical", "paradoxical", "fantastical", "concise", "precise", "realistic", "calm", "ambiguous", "surrealistic", "impersonal", and "compelling". Many of these qualities are mutually exclusive, but it would certainly be possible to find sections of Kafka's works. Kafka's language seems determined to disturb: It obviously provokes reflection and speculation, but above all, it provokes unease.

This unease attributes in part to the simple yet ambiguous words Kafka uses in the novel as Mark Harman, the translator of *The Castle* states that an English translator must grapple with the often conflicting demands of Kafka's tone and style (Harman, 2005, p. xviii). In the lines of a master like Kafka, colloquial German sounds both colloquial and terse. As Harman mentions in his notes that during the process of his translating a simple phrase could be a thorny issue for colloquial English tends to be less succinct. For instance, in the end of the first chapter, K. asks his two would-be assistants where they have put their surveying equipment, and they respond: "Wir haben keine". One probable translation is "We have none", which captures the terse style of the original but introduces an inappropriately wooden tone. Another translation "We don't have any" is tonally accurate but somewhat less pithy.[6] It is not so easy to echo Kafka's terseness.

A word needs to be said about Kafka's light and sometimes unconventional punctuation. When a continuous sequence of the protagonist's experiences and thoughts is narrated, this is done in a single sentence, divided by commas only, so as not to interrupt the flow:

In general, the sentence starts off in a large capital letter with the speaker, bends out in its course as far as it can towards the listeners and with the period returns to him. But if the period is omitted, one clause is detached from this chain to form a separate sentence, so that the impulse of the passage is lost, then the sentence is no

[6] Mark Harman selected the latter in his translation.

longer constrained. The unorthodox punctuation serves to convey the rhythm of the events and thoughts recounted.

Catching the tone is particularly important in pregnant passages. How to describe Kafka's style in *The Castle*? Thomas Mann uses "precise, almost official conservatism" (Harman, 2005, p. 87). Yet that is only part of the story. "The writers in Kafka's eclectic pantheon mirror his oscillation between conservative-classical and modern styles" (Harman, 2005, p. xviii). Kafka's approach to language and form may have been influenced by the writers, such as Dickens and Flauber and the like. He also draws his terms from the language of law and science, with no giving them a kind of ironic precision and with no intrusion of the author's private sentiments. There is an almost pedantic care with which the narrator qualifies actions and situations as we note in particular the repeated use of the adverbs, such as "a little", "hardly", "something", "completely", "probably", etc. His tone is heavy, formal but, in many ways, readers do not expect factual language at such a point. The narrator, however, completely avoids traditional expectation in his approach to language. As a result, readers feel estranged. They are distanced from the text, and possibly confused, by the combination of legalisms with an occasionally playful approach to language and by the lack of emotional vocabulary to describe emotionally shocking events.

Characterization

In Kafka's stories, the plots are organized layer upon layer, paradoxical to each other. His general tendency of thinking may not be in terms of concepts, but quite simply in pictures. Max Brod (1995) said, Kafka "thought in pictures" and "spoke in pictures" (p. 36). The particular configuration of *The Castle* depends entirely on individuals, and it varies and displays internal contradictions according to the villagers' perceptions and actions, which can be indicated in the list of numbered chapter headed with characters' names. In Kafka's works, the only way readers gain an insight into the deeper thoughts of his characters is through the images the characters express themselves. Here, the paper explores the labyrinth atmosphere reflected in the structure of *The Castle* by analyzing Kafka's characterization.

Writing is a necessity for Kafka to depict his own life and the central figure in his story. We could sort the characters' different roles in the story into two categories: K., the outsider, belongs to the first world and other peasants in the village are part of the second world.

K., the Ostensible Land-Surveyor

K. is the protagonist of the story. He arrives at the village, claiming to be a land-surveyor appointed by the Castle authorities but in vain. All his efforts are made to gain recognition from an authority, to come through his land-surveyor title, and to search a proof of his identity. He makes love to the barmaid Frieda, befriends with Barnabas' family, meets the village official, and sends messages to the Castle; however, all of his strategies fail. Brod observes Kafka intention and he knows K. should die exhausted by his efforts. On his deathbed, he receives a permit to stay. K. is doomed to stay outside the Castle through his life.

The identity of K. is the most labyrinthic in the story. At the beginning of *The Castle*, Kafka leaves readers a puzzle: Who is K.? Even he himself asks the voice from the Castle: "Who am I, then?" (2005, p. 21). The labyrinth starts off here.

K.'s statement on the night of his arrival that he is a land-surveyor hired by the Count leads to a haze. K. admits that he wanders into the village and it is obvious that he does not know where he is. There is nothing about

the statement that suggests a purposeful visit. Nor is there anything to suggest his pretension of knowing nothing about the Castle's presence. Pressed by the ill-mannered Schwarzer, K. strikes back and claims that his coming is because of a summon from the owner of the Castle himself, for the voice is "remarkably soft" and firm. When he finishes his claim, he "turned toward the stove" calmly (2005, p. 3). There is no need to cast doubt on him.

Schwarzer's call to the Castle brings a quick denial of K.'s claim. But almost immediately a call from the Castle brings a reversal. It seems that Kafka wants to warn us against trusting any messages from the Castle over the phone. Though K.'s claim has been proved genuine by the Castle, it is highly questionable.

Furthermore, K.'s reaction to the Castle's acceptance of his claim raises doubt: K. listened intently. So, the Castle had appointed him as the land-surveyor.

Having realized that he has been appointed by the Castle as land-surveyor, K. ponders this case in his mind at length quite dialectical. The questions are here, if K. is really a land-surveyor employed by the Castle, why is it "unfavorable" that the Castle had recognized him? What can the statement of the Castle's "taking up the struggle with a smile" mean other than that K.'s claim is a false one and that he is being dared to prove it? If he really is the land-surveyor, why should he take the Castle's recognition of him as a sign that the Castle was trying "to keep him terrified"? His ignorance of the matter of two assistants and his thoughts about the letter from the Castle are further evidences against K.'s claim. In the end, when the landlady charges K. with having lied about his claim ("You're not telling the truth. Why don't you tell the truth"), he does not press his claim or become indignant at the charge. He simply replies, "You don't tell the truth either" (2005, p. 314).

Narrative, layer upon layer in structure, each contradicts the other. Every time you think, you could see through K., and you find you make mistake it immediately after a few lines. The maze of K.'s identity is the core of Kafka's story running through all pages and remains to the end of the story.

The Peasantry and the Castle

The peasantry lives in the outward of the Castle. In Kafka's writing, according to the villagers' perceptions and actions, the configuration of *The Castle* varies and displays internal contradictions. For example, the landlord allows K., to spend the night with no questions; but Schwarzer, in the name of the Castle, demands a permit. The mayor is very gracious and speaks to K. of his right to courteous treatment; the teacher is abusive. Barnabas and his family are hospitable; from Lasemann's house, K. is bodily ejected. Such actions, although inconsistent, constitute and modify the nature of the Castle. Just as the teacher tells K., "there is no difference between the peasantry and the Castle" (2005, p. 11) and this proves true.

The connection between the village and the Castle exist but is enigmatic.

On the one hand, the villagers are in the domain of the Castle—somehow encompassed; the authority is immanent in all village life. The villagers and the clerks often initiate "policies" of their own in the name of the Castle. Schwarzer, who is neither an official nor a clerk, initiates a "permit policy" of his own in the name of the Castle. The landlord of the Gentlemen's Inn refuses K.'s asking for a staying over and says it is a matter of regulation.

On the other hand, the Castle is not an independent entity; the existence and meaning of which must lie with the villagers. There are some facts that are instructive concerning the absence of an external Castle: The mayor indicates it is a common and accepted practice for the clerks to take official action upon themselves. Amalia

dramatically rejects an official's demand. And when punishment is meted out to Amalia this is entirely the work of the villagers, with no official direction or intervention. "We all knew that no definite punishment would be visited on us", Olga tells K., "the Castle gave us no sign" (2005, p. 207).

K.'s quest to get into the Castle is representative, for it introduces other characters irrelevant or relevant to a similar search. The most important figures are Frieda and Amalia as they continue the story from where K.'s leaves off. Frieda is a resolute, calm, and matter-of-fact person. She gives up her status as the mistress of the Castle official and leaves with K. to be a school janitor. K. gains through her personality some insight into a possible solution of his quest, and, when he speaks of her with affection, he seems himself to be breaking through his sense of isolation.

The Labyrinth for Outsider

"In a world suddenly devoid of illusion and light, man feels like a stranger" (Camus, 1991, p. 7). In fiction, the author must create a system, or circumstance, in which the writing could be done. This system, or circumstance as we maintain in *The Caste* before is a labyrinth. We get to know a style what we can understand, but it conveys a meaning we cannot really understand. The last chapter tells that the labyrinth is a style, and a structure. But what does the labyrinth embody? What is this system designed for?

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the idea of labyrinth originated from the Greek mythology, that King Minos' Labyrinth on Crete is an elaborate structure for holding a creature, half man and half bull. The labyrinth is so cunningly designed that anyone ever getting into it could barely escape it.

During the medieval times, the labyrinth carried religious significance, symbolizing a hard path to God with a clearly defined center (God) and one entrance (birth). Labyrinths can be thought as symbol of pilgrimage; people can walk on the path, ascending towards salvation or enlightenment.

In the modern literary world , the parable labyrinth has inspired a great many authors. Expressionistic short stories and novels frequently deal with alienated protagonists trapped in complex situations beyond their comprehension. The theme of the individual's estrangement, absurdity, and anxiety occupies existentialist works. The symbolism inherent in the labyrinth represents first of all an irrational universe that multiplicity, or unknown factors, exemplifies a lack of order or apparent purpose. These labyrinthic forces preclude any rational or positivistic analysis that might diminish man's bewilderment or frustration as he searches for some sense, order, or purpose in the world around him.

The labyrinth of time is one of Borges' most beautiful and powerful conceptions. His labyrinth does not lead him to God like the medieval one, and the existence of a chaotic world does not constitute a proof to him that an incomprehensible divine power is lurking behind it. His speculations are mostly about knowledge.[7] It is in this light that we should follow his constant wanderings through the maze that exemplifies the hopelessness of pursuing knowledge or order and only leads to a feeling of absolute futility.

It is said that in almost all the stories of the collection *El Aleph*[8] of Borges, there exists a tangible spiritual

[7] Borges here is not obsessed or even concerned with theological considerations when he probes into the world of phenomena. His quest is largely concerned with epistemological problems.

[8] *El Aleph* (*The Aleph*) was first published in 1949, including the same titled story "The Aleph" which is an attempt to explore and dramatize a philosophical or scientific riddle.

labyrinth. This labyrinth corresponding to the individual existence which is really a search for the centre of the labyrinth, for mortality, for power, for ultimate certainty. The process twists perpetually and leading eventually to the startling truth. The labyrinth of irrationality and arbitrary authority is structured layer upon layer, just like the Delphic oracle, who counseled the seeker: "know thyself".

In Kafka's stories, there is one noticeable trait that reflects well in Kafka's some stories concerning judges. Although Kafka was a lawyer in insurance, he did not write a single story from the perspective of a legal insider such as a judge, prosecutor, or lawyer. Instead, he depicted law from the perspective of outsiders subject to an unknowable and alienating legal system composed of endless layers of petty officials. This posture is most visible in Kafka's best-known parable, *Before the Law*, in which he actually modeled an outsider jurisprudence—the country man who could not get into the law until his death.

The central figure in Kafka's story is almost always the case in Kafka. W. H. Auden recognized that the protagonist in Kafka's novel was turned into an "Everyman, a man of Man" (Adler, 2001, p. 3). What is the everyman? An outsider of modern age.

Understanding the Outsider

Colin Henry Wilson in his non-fiction book *The Outsider* first published in 1956 explores the psyche of the outsider and gives a fulfilled definition of it. The outsider is an individual engaged in an intense self-exploration—a person who lives at the edge, challenges cultural values, and "stands for Truth" (1987, p. 13). Born into a world without perspective, where others simply drift through life, the outsider creates his own set of rules and lives them in an unsympathetic environment.

Albert Camus in his timeless literary classic, *The Stranger* (translated from French *L'Entranger*, also titled as *The Outsider*) recounts a tale of an average lower middle-class French Algerian Colonist named Mersault who finds himself involved in a pointless murder. Meursault has a normal life but is completely absent from any of traditional values present in his society. He is a person who is isolated or detached from the activities or concerns of his own community, an outsider.

The stranger is, as Camus (1991) described it, "faced with the absurd" (p. 121).

Such absurd surrealistic images frequently appeared in Kafka's writings and so did themes of alienation and persecution. A traveling salesman wakes up one morning to find himself transformed into a giant insect (*The Metamorphosis*). A banker is arrested for an unknown crime (*The Trial*), and inscrutable Law (*Before the Law*). In a penal settlement, a torture machine inscribes justice upon a victim's body (*In the Penal Colony*).

As Camus says, on the one hand, we hope to find some meaning—or God, or order, or explanation—in the universe, and on the other hand, we are faced with a senseless multiplicity of things that do not organize themselves in any way that promises an answer. The feeling of absurdity exiles us from the homelike comforts of a meaningful existence (1991, p. 124).

The Outsider in the Labyrinth of *The Castle*

The centre of the labyrinth in the story is the Castle and the official Klamm. It stands for some kind of transcendent significance, God, ideal, a state of grace, and salvation. An outsider is an individual who struggles to search this in a world full of irrational orders and a senseless multiplicity of things that do not organize

themselves in any way that promises an answer. The world the outsider searches for is a labyrinth with divergence.

The Castle also plays on this theme that K.'s plight as expressing modern life as a whole is reduced, neurotic, and isolating. Here, the process of finding a meaning in one's life or a place in the universe is expressed through K.'s struggle in his position of land-surveyor. He feels that he has a right to have this position even though it is constantly denied him just as we feel we ought to have a place in the universe and that life ought to make sense, even though this feeling is false.

K. enters the labyrinth, cautiously at first, gradually becoming more aggressive, challenging both the petty, arrogant officials and the villagers who accept their authority.

That is the way K. acts in the Castle, and the way he is trying to go simply impossible. The Castle is not an independent entity, and its existence lies in the villagers who mutually accept that they are part of a community, while K. is out of tune with the common social value and disregards the counseling from others, posing himself in patience, persisting in his obsession concerning personal acceptance through formal recognition. He seeks a salvation but in vain. His unique and unsatisfying status in the village roots here. K. is not from the Castle; nor from the village; he is nothing. Unfortunately, though, he is something, an ostensible land-surveyor, an outsider.

Conclusion

Kafka himself could not always tell where his words would lead him: "where, then, shall I be brought?" (1988, p. 399), he asks himself in the diaries not long before sitting down to write *The Castle*. We, too, constantly ask ourselves. Although we are often uncertain of what happen in the strange world of the village and the Castle, Kafka holds us in thrall through a startling combination of breathless intensity and ironic—and at times even drily humorous—detachment.

The answer to Kafka's riddle remains inconclusive. How it achieves its effect and how, in particular, it achieves such "openness"? In *The Castle*, he uses unique writing skills to combine precise "realistic" detail with absurdity, careful observation and reasoning on the part of the protagonists with inexplicable obliviousness and carelessness; he organizes the plots together layer upon layer with internal contradiction by portraying the figures, leading readers into the world of bewilderment and not-understanding.

References

Adler, J. (2001). *Franz Kafka: Illustrated lives*. London: Penguin Books.

Baker, J. R. (1957). The castle: A problem in structure. *Twentieth Century Literature*, (3), 74-77.

Borges, J. L. (1989). The garden of forking paths in *Ficciones* (A. Bonner, Trans.). New York: Grove Press.

Brod, M. (1995). *Franz Kafka*: *A biography* (G. Roberts, Humphreys and R. W., Trans.). New York: Da Capo Press.

Camus, A. (1991). Appendix: Hope and the absurd in the work of Franz Kafka. In *The myth of Sisyphus and other essays* (J. O'Brien Trans., pp. 124-138). New York: Vintage.

Cohn, D. (1971). Castles and anti-Castles, or Kafka and Robbe-Grillet. *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, (5), 19-31.

Harman, M. (2005). *Digging the pit of Babel: Retranslating Franz Kafka's Castle.* Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Kafka, F. (1972). *The metamorphosis* (S. Corngold, Trans.). New York: Bantam Classics.

Kafka, F. (1988). *The diaries* (M. Brod, Ed., & J. Kresh, Trans.). London: Schocken Books Inc.

Kafka, F. (2005). *The castle* (M. Harman, Trans.). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Lewald, H. E. (1962). The labyrinth of time and place in two stories by Borges. *Hispania*, (45), 630-636.

Olsen, L. (1986). Diagnosing fantastic autism: Kafka, Borges, Robbe-Grillet. *Modern Language Studies*, (16), 35-43.

Preece, J. (2002). *The Cambridge companion to Kafka*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Rastalsky, H. M. (1997). *No exit? Hegemony and hopelessness in Kafka, Beckett, and Handke*. Michigan: The University of Michigan.

Smetana, R. (1991). The peasantry and the Castle: Kafka's social psychology. *Twentieth Century Literature*, (37), 54-58.

Steinberg, E. R. (1965). K. of the castle: Ostensible land-surveyor. *College English*, (27), 185-189.

Susan, S. (2001). *Against interpretation and other essays*. New York: Picador.

Webster, P. D. (1951). A critical examination of Franz Kafka's "The Castle". *American Imago: A Psychoanalytic Journal for the Arts and Sciences*, (8), 35-60.

Wilson, C. (1987). *The outsider*. New York: Tarcher.