CHAPTER-II

The Critical Scene

*My life is a hesitation before birth.*

Franz Kafka, *Diaries*, January 24, 1922.

This chapter attempts to give an overview of the existing commentary made in the Kafka canon. Kafka is one of the most interpreted writers and a subject of numerous critical studies. He has been so diversely pigeon-holed that any straight-jacketed version seems a difficult task. There have been several approaches like modernist, magic realist, psychoanalytical, socio-political, theological, feminist, theoretical and biographical interpretations to the study of Franz Kafka. Edwin Muir points out that unlike the clear-cut simplicity of Bunyan's allegory of a Christian resolutely treading the path of salvation; in Kafka, it is not so simple because "there are countless places of refuge" but "only one place of salvation"; and where "the possibilities of salvation......are as numerous as the places of refuge" (Gray, 1962, 42). Martin Greenberg finds Kafka’s works as religious allegory, rather Cabbalistic allegory, wherein Kafka’s heroes struggle not to unite with God but to unite with himself and seek divinity in himself and through himself in the world. He says: "Kafka soars to the giddiest heights of Romanticism, wishing to create, not merely worlds like God (Joyce’s ambition and the classical ambition of the great poet), but God Himself in himself (Blake’s ambition)" (Greenberg, 1971, 219). But since it is a demand too great he plunges into the most 'dreariest' and the 'most disappointed depths of realism.' Many feel that Brod’s presentation of Kafka is colored by his deep friendship. Brod essentially sees Kafka as a prophet and so a profoundly spiritual...
writer. Many have questioned Brod's editorial competence, often accused him of negligence, even radically altering the texts while arranging for the posthumous publication of Kafka's works. Brod has taken liberties like cleaning up the punctuations, naming the unfinished chapters, and so the editions of Brod are generally referred as the 'Definitive Editions'. Malcolm Pasley was able to get most of Kafka's original handwritten work into the Oxford Bodleian Library in 1961. The original text of The Trial was later acquired through auction and stored at the German literary archives in Germany. Subsequently Pasley headed a team (including Gerhard Neumann, Jost Schillemeit, and Jurgen Born) in reconstructing the German novels; and it was later republished by S. Fischer Verlag. Pasley was the editor of The Castle published in 1982 and The Trial published in 1990. Jost Schillemeit was the editor of Amerika published in 1983. These editions are called the 'Critical Editions' or the 'Fisher Editions'. Kafka's principal English translator, Edwin Muir, like Brod, spiritualizes Kafka. Harold Bloom sees no divinity in Kafka and in The Western Cannon he writes: "It is safe to say that there are not limitations, let alone representations, of divinity in Kafka's stories and novels. There are plenty of demons masking as gods, and there are enigmatic animals (and animal-like constructs), but God is always somewhere else, a long way off in the abyss, or else sleeping, or perhaps dead. Kafka, a fantasist of almost unique genius, is a romance author and in no way a religious writer. He is not even the Jewish Gnostic or Cabalist of Scholem's and Benjamin's imaginings, because has no hope, not for himself or for us anyway" (Bloom, 1995, 451). The religious aspect of Kafka's works were also pointed out in France by several eminent scholars like Robert Rochefort in 1947; Michel Carouges in 1948, Andre Nemeth in 1947 and R. Dauvin in 1949. In Germany, Kafkean interest flourished only after the Second World War. Most critics like Max Bense in 1951 saw
Kafka as a metaphysical writer, more as a thinker sharing affinity with Heidegger. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, a compilation of essays came out as The Kafka Problem (1946), edited by Angel Flores, where Albert Camus points out hope and absurdity in Kafka; and W.H.Auden calls Kafka a ‘metaphysical’ writer; and Erich Heller interprets Kafka’s works as the “history of the human mind”. According to Erich Heller, there is no answer to any of the givenness in Kafka. So to say why is it that guilt is never doubted and law is never in question in Kafka’s worldview is because the law giver is full of caprice as in The Metamorphosis, The Judgment, or incongruous as in Odradek, or inapproachable as in The Castle, or inscrutable as in The Trial or absurd as in Amerika. Heller elaborates on this givenness:

There is no answer to any of these questions; indeed, there is no answerable question to be found anywhere in the works of Kafka. For it is in the nature of his questions that they allow of no answers: in the unfinished story Investigations of a Dog, the ‘investigator says of himself that, like every other dog, he has the impulse to question as well as the simultaneous impulse ‘not to answer’. It is even true to say that Kafka’s questions are not only unanswerable but also unquestionable. This is one of the secrets of his art: he wields the magic by which to remove the question mark from the questionable. Where he succeeds, the questions have been transformed into an indisputable givenness, something as affirmative as trees or mountains or oceans or Odradeks.

(Heller, 1974, 20)

It was Gunther Anders in 1951 who calls Kafka a nihilistic writer, a precursor of ‘Nazi Philosophy’ suitable for condemnation, this comment provoking Brod to accuse Anders of misinterpretation. However, many like Anders see a close connection
between Kafka’s art and his social background in Germany like Rudolf Fuchs, Edwin Berry Burgum, Egon Vietta, and Max Lerner. Pavel Eisner’s *Franz Kafka and Prague* (1950) sees in Kafka’s works the voice of the alienated Jew. Brod was of the opinion that one can have a greater insight on Jewry from the reading of *The Castle* than from the whole lot of learned treatises. Psychoanalysis helps in deciphering the individual’s behavior as manifestations of psychic life whose roots lie in the unconscious. Charles Neider in *The Frozen Sea: A Study of Franz Kafka* (1948) studies Freudian fear of castration and neurosis replete with sexual, particularly phallic symbols; and Paul Goodman’s *Kafka’s Prayer* (1947) also invites psychoanalytical readings. Other critics with similar approach were Erich Fromm, Joachim Seypel and Frederick J. Hofman. Heinz Politzer also talks of how Kafka’s writings are extensions of his own life. He shows Kafka “infatuated by words and images, their cadence and their ambivalence.” Wilhelm Emrich reveals that the strangeness or the bizarre in Kafka’s world is because it stands outside time and space. In contrast to Brod, Herman Uyttersprot finds a definite pattern from Kafka’s works- a sudden opening, a turning point, and a denouement, most often leading to the death of the hero. Although A.E. Dyson in his book *Between Two worlds: Aspects of Literary Form* has worked out the similarity between Kafka’s *The Trial* and Lewis Carrol’s *Alice in Wonderland*, yet he also makes it clear that the similarity ends the moment Alice wakes up to the sanity and order of Victorian England; and realizing that after all the people of her dream were only packs of cards but in Kafka’s *The Trial*, the threat of persecution continues. Dyson sees Kafka as representative of ‘Everyman’ who is face to face with the enigma of this universe and unable to find any solution to the malaise faced by modern man. The theme of *The Castle*, according to Max Brod is of ‘that prodigious ballad of the homeless stranger
who vainly strives to establish roots in the home of his choice" (B, 219). Brod opines that while his narratives voice Kafka’s uncertainties; his aphorisms are more positive. His narratives show man as confused but his aphorisms define man’s way out, devoid of the nagging doubts and self-torment. Possibly in his aphorisms there is a greater self-control unlike in the narratives where man is a victim of the forces of tragedy and absurdity. Julian Preece calls Kafka as one of the most cosmopolitan writers who is preoccupied with the theme of belonging and non-belonging. Malcolm Pasley speaks of Kafka’s act of writing as ‘listening’*(David Constantine extends it to listening and ‘attending’ to something intense) to the point of forgetting the self. According to David Constantine, Kafka’s fiction is a ‘process’ by passing through which the life of the author and the lives of its readers may be changed forever. Truth cannot be reached just as K. never gets into the Castle and Joseph K. fails to understand his case or Karl Rossmann fails to make his career in the foreign land. The reasoning mind fails to grapple with the truth that lies buried within the text. Anne Fuchs in her essay “A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Man who Disappeared” considers Karl Rossmann’s predicament as both repression and exclusion embodying ‘physical and epistemological dislocation’( Preece, 1999, 26). J.P.Stern regards Kafka’s works as finely observed critique of power. The Judgment is a story of the return of the repressed and how Kafka ‘endows a partly arbitrary (‘subjective’) law with the validity and power of a wholly objective law, and shows that this is what he is doing’ (Stern, 1980, 123) However, Kafka is an exposer of power and does not remain a passive victim. In a similar vein, Theodor Adorno proclaims Kafka’s writing to be reactions to unlimited power, both patriarchal and socio-economic. Elias Canetti regards Kafka as ‘the greatest expert on power’ (Canetti, 1974, 80); and Herbert Kraft sees Kafka’s works depicting the workings of ‘hegemony’( Kraft, 1983, 204). Herbert
Kraft rereads Kafka’s texts as political tracts on the nature of power where the ‘law’ is actually a euphemism for hegemony. Mark M. Anderson uses the concept of Verkehr meaning both ‘intercourse’ both social and sexual and how Kafka’s works engages in it. Sander Gilman studies the ‘pathological Jew’ and studies Kafka’s works as discourses about race, gender and disease. In The Trial, In The Penal Colony, The Metamorphosis, a healthy individual is marginalized as an outcast and reduced to a non-entity. Elizabeth Boa sees in Kafka a feminist critique. For her Kafka’s work is a symptom of ‘a crisis in a militaristic age of decaying traditional patriarchy in which masculinity assumes a sado-masochistic character’ (Boa, 1995, 95). Boa finds in Kafkas’s works misogynistic and patriarchal where women are critically marginalized; for example in The Trial all women suffer from an intense longing for the castle Chieftain Klamm even though it involves degrading themselves; like the Landlady of the Bridge Inn Gardena who is unable to get off her love for him even after many years. If men seem obsessed in conquering the world outside, like K. attempting to penetrate the castle, the women folk are imprisoned within themselves like Amalia or if at all they seek to move out they corrupt themselves like the promiscuous Olga. The only image of the new woman is the schoolteacher called Gisa but she also is seldom presented with a voice of her own. According to Boa, the central theme of The Judgment is “the unveiling of the phallus to the son, the violation of the biblical taboo that calls for the death of the transgressor” (Boa, 1995, 115); the author problematizing the son’s denial of sex vis-à-vis procreation by the father figure. Thus Kafka’s world is a male-oriented world where women are powerless and voiceless. However, contrary to many popular beliefs, Kafka was heavily influenced by women. Women do serve to fulfill the emotional needs of the male hero as seen in all the works of Kafka. Dogmar C.G.Lorenz in her essay Kafka
and Gender notes the image of the male provider in The Metamorphosis and although woman suffrage was by then in order, Amalia suffered in The Castle by the rejection of the male as aggressor; female employment was in vogue but never in the upper levels of hierarchy as seen in the inns of The Trial; women in Kafka’s works are subjected to positions of subordination. Only men occupy the centre stage and if there are women, they are often presented as deterrents to the plot as the maid Rose in the short story The Country Doctor. His works do not end in happy marriages; seldom is marriage discussed in The Trial. In The Castle mass prostitution is rampant, often women are sexually promiscuous figures like Olga in The Castle or Clara in the novel Amerika and love affairs are fraught with problems; in the short story The Married Couple the submissive wife is more of a maid helping the husband. As seen through ages women are often clubbed with the other marginalized communities and hence Kafka’s works can also be a discourse on the Jews regards Giuliano Baioni. Baioni’s Zionism, Literature and the Yiddish Theatre is an interesting reading of Kafka at the crossroads in 1911. Stanley Corngold in Lambent Traces (2004) searches for the original Kafka. He compares the complex contradiction of Kafka to a double helix, with two opposing elements swirling around each other in a confusing twist. Lambent Traces is a collection of essays which is heavily influenced by anti-Semitism of the early twentieth century. Sander L. Gilman’s Franz Kafka: The Jewish Patient (1995) attempts to transform Kafka’s writing into a sub-conscious filtering of anti-Semitism. According to Corngold, Kafka was not just a man who was defined by his culture, but beyond. Lambent Traces explores Kafka’s mysticism and his obsessions with immorality and the metaphysical. He divides Kafka into two parts- the notion of the ‘two Kafkas’; one is the bachelor writer, an ascetic and a mystic and the other being a family man rounded in the
empirical reality. Corngold explored these elements as mutually exclusive yet joined at the hip. Finally he turns the criticism of Kafka into a critique of cultural studies. In the 1930's there were debates between Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin. While Brecht considered him a 'failure' who was 'caught under the wheels' of petit-bourgeois values; Benjamin anticipated several levels of political and Jewish mythological meanings: "It is necessary to clarify Kafka, that is to say to formulate the practicable suggestions that can be extracted from his stories. It is to be supposed that such suggestions can be extracted from them, if only because of their tone of superior calm" (Benjamin, 1973,110). The psychoanalytic critics will see Kafka's works as an expression of his pathological state. There are critics who will force a relationship between the author and the sociological or psychological conditions. They analyze the text on the basis of theory which is a priori; such theories serving for a diagnostic purpose. But one needs to go beyond these frameworks; and the objective study of his work show Kafka's philosophical concepts of the world and explorations of the psychological reality. Simple allegorical interpretations are also not enough. The irrational world of Kafka is expressed through the fantastic tales yet they are not there only for the sake of literary effect; but they convey the author's unique vision of life. Albert Camus finds The Trial and The Castle as complementary works; if The Trial diagnoses, The Castle treats the problem; and at the end one begins to love what crushes us and makes hope spring up. Camus calls this 'leap' from which hope arises in his essay 'Hope and the absurd in the World of Franz Kafka'. Camus in the essay 'Hope and the Absurd in the World of Franz Kafka' from The Myth of Sisyphus writes:

It is strange in any case that works of related inspiration like those of Kafka, Kierkegaard, or Chestov; those, in short, of existential novelists
and philosophers completely oriented towards the absurd and its consequences, should in the long run lead to that tremendous cry of hope. They embrace the God that consumes them. It is through humility that hope enters in. For the absurd of this existence assures them a little more of supernatural reality. If the course of this life leads to God, there is outcome after all. And the perseverance, the insistence with which Kierkegaard, Chestov, and Kafka’s heroes repeat their itineraries are a special warrant of the uplifting power of that certainty.

(Camus, 1942 , 153)

Many reviewers have called his world ‘a Torquemada cross-word lacking a framework’ (*New Statesman*, April 12, 1930); or ‘an elaborate and indeed a tortuous allegory’ and ‘an aimless rigmarole’ (*Saturday Review*, April 12, 1930); or complained of being thrown into a world where people speak in endless sentences for hours and in unparagraphed pages. Felix Bertaux who has made a survey of German Literature called *A Panorama of German Literature* (1935) speaks of Kafka’s ‘astonishing intensity’ and his ‘passion for clarity that is Slav or Jewish or perhaps even French’.

In England, the *Times Literary Supplement* in May 11, 1933, wrote of the ‘strange and baffling’ effect, ‘elusive and uncertain’ metaphysical meanings, displaying the author’s ‘habit of looking at the universe as a problem in metaphysics rather than in its material aspects’; the style which was ‘careful and extraordinarily serpentine’, was no more than ‘well suited to his intricate turn of thought.’ Even after the Second World War, England did not receive his works favorably. It was regarded as man’s search for absolute verities, condemned not for his exploration of captivity but for his failure to make a simultaneous exploration of freedom. In 1946, the French Communists published an enquiry entitled ‘Must Kafka be Burned?’ arguing that he was a dangerous representative of ‘black’ literature, likely to have a demoralizing influence on society. Erich Heller further says: “It is the very spiritual uprooted ness
of the age which has deprived us of all sureness of religious discrimination. To men, suffering from spiritual starvation, even a rotten fruit of the spirit may taste like bread from Heaven, and the liquid from a poisoned well like the water of life” (Heller, 1952, 160). Edmund Wilson in his essay Classics and Commercials (1950) compares Kafka to Gogol and Poe and sees their writings as compensation for their neurasthenia.

Ronald Gray is of the opinion that Kafka shared his religious affiliation more with the Christians than with the Jews, which makes Kafka more European in tradition. There are plenty of Christian symbols strewn in the texts of Kafka like a church instead of a synagogue; his diaries referring to the mention of the Messiah; but ultimately rejecting both Judaism and Christianity. In In the Penal Colony, the relationship between the Old Commander and the New Officer is often interpreted as the relationship between Jehovah and Christ. Austin Warren writes: “The earth is a penal colony, and we are all under sentence of judgment of sin for sin. There was once a very elaborate machine, of scholastic theology, for the pronouncement of sentence, and an elaborate ecclesiastical system for its administration. Now it is in process of disappearance: the old commander (God) has died, though there is a legend which you can believe or not, that he will come again” (Warren, 1946, 70). But again Ronald Gray is of the opinion that the officer dies proving his conviction rather than out of love for men, while the guilt of the prisoner bears no relationship to the Christian belief of reward and punishment or even of the Second Coming. Kafka sheds light on what happens when the contact between man and the indestructible is cut off. For Brod, Kafka is a religious hero, a prophet who would fight a thousand temptations to experience the transcendental. The religious approach is also vouched by R.O.C.Wrinkler and Thomas Mann regards Kafka a ‘religious humorist’. However, Ronald Gray opines that Kafka has deliberately self-distanced himself by the use of
‘he’ in his aphorisms. Kafka as a neurotic literary artist is a common perception but Philip Rahv steers clear by regarding Kafka not just a neurotic artist but an artist of neurosis 'objectifying through imaginative means the states of mind typical of neurosis and hence in incorporating his private world into the public world we all live in' (Rahv, 1970, 184); and in this way he could free himself of his burden and make the readers his accomplices. But this interpretation does not hold ground when one considers that Kafka was not a hopelessly pathological figure who sought the release of his repressed demons through his writings because he did not have the publication of his works or the general readership in mind whilst he was writing. He wrote for no one but for himself. Anthony Thorlby is of the opinion that the way Kafka’s imagination responded to the world are actually ways of not asking what went wrong with the world; but to actually ask what went wrong with us. Kafka rose above the cliché of contemporary thought analyzing the barrenness of the age with metaphysical assertions. But Thorlby rejects such objective grounds:

The collapse of conventions, that cliché of contemporary thought, is a psychological collapse, rather than something that has happened ‘out there’ in society. Or rather, Kafka teaches us to see that the ultimate terror brought about by such a collapse is that we feel trapped inside a deluded consciousness of the world, regarding all conventional representations of existence as false, but for that every reason unable to extricate ourselves from them. Kafka’s mythology makes us aware of the impossibility of distinguishing what happens ‘out there’ and our consciousness of it. This is like living in a nightmare, knowing it to be a nightmare, but being unable to wake up.

(Thorlby, 1974, 94)

Walter Benjamin has made a study of the mythic and folktale element in Kafka’s parables. Benjamin’s essay, published in 1934 is called “Franz Kafka: On the Tenth
Anniversary of his Death.” Other works in the similar direction Heinz Politzer’s *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox* (1962). Walter Sokel’s *Franz Kafka: Tragik und Ironie* (1964) studies it as both parable and tragedy; aspects of literary form, paradox, irony and rhetoric. Another work which similarly studies form, rhetoric and philosophy together with the concept of the ‘true Universal’ in Kafka is Wilhelm Emrich, *Franz Kafka: A Critical Study of his Writings* (1968); and Maurice Blanchot’s *The Space of Literature* (1982) sees the need of carving of literary space amidst speculations of philosophy against the twentieth-century anathema of despair. Theodor Adorno “Notes on Kafka” (1984) as is norm with the Frankfurt School studies it against the philosophic, historical and socio-political contexts. James Rolleston in his *Kafka’s Narrative Theatre* writes “For Kafka, the theatrical metaphor is implicit in the very act of writing” (Rolleston, 1975, ix). One can see how his novel *Amerika* ends with the protagonist Karl joining the Nature Theatre at the end. Kafka’s world presented in his works is akin to a theatre; also the two men who execute Joseph K. in *The Trial* appear to be second-rate actors; and the entire episode though tragic is essentially theatrical. Gunther Anders in *Franz Kafka* writes: “From great warnings we should be able to learn, and they should help us to reach others. The picture [Kafka] has drawn of the world as it should not be, and of attitudes which should not be ours, will be of use to us if it becomes imprinted on our minds as a warning. It is a picture drawn by a good man, who finally came to doubt the value of his work, and even pleaded for its destruction. His work could never be of use to himself or to others as positive counsel; but as a warning it may be truly helpful to us after all.” Ritchie Robertson finds an affinity between Kafka and Conrad, calling both ‘conservative modernists’ whose narratives have an air of ambiguity but imbued with deep psychological and epistemological enigmas. Freudian and Psychoanalytical
readings have been undertaken by the following critics: Walter Sokel’s *The Programme of K.’s Court: Oedipal and Existential Meanings of The Trial* in *On Kafka: Semi-Centenary Perspectives* (1976) reads Kafka as a study of the ‘pure self’ and Marthe Robert’s *Franz Kafka’s Loneliness* (1982) has interpreted Kafka’s impotence with psychological impotence caused by familial struggle which was deciphered by Freud. Its origin could be infantile relating to the oedipal dream, wherein the mother becomes the earthly object of the son’s sexual instinct and how later Kafka’s love for Felice occupies the status of the mother and becomes an object of the incest taboo, Kafka finding it difficult to maintain normal sexual relationships with women outside his family circle; so Kafka idealizes his love for Felice to such an extent and places Felice on a high pedestal so as not to touch her and violate the blood taboo; perhaps which also led Kafka to call Milena “mother” and his favorite sister Ottla ‘big mother’. In his short story *The Knock at the Manor Gate*, the son/brother suffers from the same incestuous feelings for the sister. Many critics see Kafka as a whining neurotic like Edmund Wilson in *Classics and Commercials* who writes Kafka is “at his most characteristic when he is assimilating men to beasts- dogs, insects, mice, and apes-which can neither dare nor know....the denationalized, discouraged, disaffected, disabled Kafka [...] can in the end only let us down” (Wilson, 1950,391). Another psychoanalytic commentator writes: “the striving for syntheses, for integration and harmony which are the marks of a healthy ego and a healthy art are lacking in Kafka’s life and his writings. The conflict is weak in Kafka’s stories because the ego is submissive; the unequal forces within the Kafka psyche create no tension within the reader, only a fraternal sadness” (Fraiberg, 1958, 218). Calvin S. Hall and Richard E. Lind in *Dreams, Life and Literature: A Study of Franz Kafka* have analyzed Kafka’s thirty-seven dreams. Kafka has narrated
Thirty-One dreams in his diaries and six in his letters to Milena Jesenska and many critics have studied it as socio-metric charts. Hall and Lind study the relation between dreams and waking behavioral pattern of Kafka and make a content analyses of his works vis-à-vis the normative sample. Their methods are based upon the objective and quantitative methods devised by Hall and Van de Castle in 1966 and not solely on the basis of Freud’s free association technique nor by Jung’s amplification methods. Hall and Lind have worked out seven themes from Kafka’s dreams: preoccupation with the body; body disfigurement; emphasis on clothing and nakedness; Scoptophilia; passivity; ambivalence; the masculinized women; and how these themes preoccupied Kafka during his waking life as well. Similarly, Hein Kohut in The Restoration of the Self (1977) talks of fragmentation of Kafka’s protagonists caused by self-objectification and through powerful figures of authority in an impersonal landscape and he traces its origins to preexisting instincts and drives. Kohut says:

It is the under stimulated child, the insufficiently responded to child, the daughter deprived of an ideal mother, the son deprived of an ideal father, that has now become paradigmatic for man’s central problem in our Western world, so it is the crumbling, fragmenting, enfeebled self of this child and later, the fragile, vulnerable, empty self of the adult that the great artists of the day describe—through time and word, on canvas and in stone—and that they try to heal.

(Kohut, 1977, 287-288)

The psychoanalytic and sociological dimension treatment has also been done by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature (1986) are also of the opinion that in Kafka there is radically questioning of idealist metaphysics and that the novel The Trial is actually engaged in ‘the dismantling of all transcendent justifications’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 51). Peter Beiken argues that
the novel **The Trial** is a naked power struggle between two antagonistic principles, equating to indictment and justification, without a clear victory emerging.\textsuperscript{25} The sociological aspect is studied by Mark Spilka’s *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation* (1963). This work is a study of squalor, poverty, lack of space constraint and stifling environment. Writing as an expiation for sin and bad faith is analyzed by Franz Kuna in *Kafka: Literature as Corrective Punishment* (1974) where the normative existential approaches have focused on loneliness, absence of meaning and loss of faith. Paul Goodman in *Kafka’s Prayer* (1947) finds meditative qualities in his aphorisms. Charles Neider in *The Frozen Sea* (1948) finds cabalist and mystical element. Theological existentialism is studied by Michel Carrouges in her work *Kafka versus Kafka* (1968) Jill Robbins in her essay *Prodigal Son/ Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity* in *Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka and Levinas* (1991) makes a hermeneutic study vis-à-vis the Kafkean son, artist and martyr. In a similar vein, it is Henry Sussman in *The Trial: Kafka’s Unholy Trinity* analyzes parallel meditations of Kafka’s status “...as the son of his particular family and times, as an individual who thought through his existential and intellectual problems in a process of literary creativity, and as a person who, artistically and on an imaginary level, suffered considerable familial conflict, self-doubt, isolation and loneliness”(Sussman, 1990,60). Sussman’s work is a brilliant analysis of the concurrent perspectives of the way a son, artist and martyr looks and interprets the world at large. Kafka as site of linguistic study and how productions of meanings are generated through the text is found out in Stanley Corngold’s *The Commentator’s Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka’s ‘Metamorphoses’* (1973). The deconstructionist study has been done by Henry Sussman in his *Franz Kafka: Geometrician of Metaphor* (1979) where he shows how Kafka is a theoretician
anticipating several modern theoretical critical practices of the modernists; and also seeks to find affinity with the intricacies in the texts be it in the courtroom, or the castle, or the fictive American expanse. A collection of essays offering theoretical linguistic issues with contributions by Derrida, Rainer Nagele, Avital Ronell and Alan Udoff is brought out as Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance (1987). A similar view is also discerned in Stanley Corngold’s Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form (1988) and rhetorical point of view is studied in Clayton Koelb’s Kafka’s Rhetoric: The Passion of Reading; and modern and postmodern contextual study has been done by Henry Sussman in Afterimages of Modernity: Structure and Indifference in Twentieth-Century Literature (1990). Important biographical studies have been done by several scholars besides Max Brod, like Franz Kafka: Man out of Step (1973) by Deborah Crawford; Kafka in Context (1975) by John Hubberd; Kafka: a Biography (1982) by Ronald Hayman; The Nightmare of Reason: a Life of Franz Kafka (1985) by Ernst Pawel; A Hesitation Before Birth: the Life of Franz Kafka (1989) by Peter Mailloux; and a very important biography of Kafka is Hartmut Binder’s Kafka-Handbuch (1979). Malcolm Pasley states that ‘nothing really true or significant could be expressed except through the channel of personal experience, and that in this wide sense all his writing is autobiographical’ (Pasley, 1977, 194); and Pasley points out ‘semi-private’ references in Kafka’s works like ‘eleven Sons’ referring to Kafka’s eleven work; also there are other such self-referential ideas like the metaphor ‘horse’ for the story, and ‘horse-rider’ for the writer, run throughout his writings. Other works which have provided invaluable insight towards Kafka’s life and works are Gustav Janouch’s Conversations with Kafka (1985), Janouch’s father worked with Kafka in the same Insurance firm, and much of the conversations with Kafka were recorded by this young poet Gustav
Janouch when Kafka was bed-ridden in Prague, and Ronald Hayman’s *Franz Kafka* offers a chronology of Kafka’s life and works. Ernst Pawel’s *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka* (1985) gives a picture of historical details along with factual information. Another work of biographical interest is Elias Canetti’s *Kafka’s Other Trial: The Letters to Felice* (1974) where the ‘other trial’ is actually the “tribunal” at the Askanische Hof hotel in July 1914; which was the result of Kafka immediately breaking off his formal engagement with Felice Bauer and coming closer to Grete Bloch. Kafka had met Grete in October 1913, who was a secretary in a business machines firm in Berlin. Simultaneously the World War First had also just begun. Pietro Citati’s *Kafka* (1990) reads Kafka’s works as religious allegory.; and Klaus Wagenbach’s *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie Seiner Jugend* (1958) regards Kafka as the quintessential figure of modernity; where Wagenbach writes that Kafka was aware of the poor and hazardous factory working conditions due to his job in the Workers’ Accident Insurance firm handling compensation cases, in this way Kafka is “the only ‘bourgeois’ writer of his time who had such first-hand knowledge” of industrial exploitation and its consequences” (Wagenbach, 1958, 104) Finally the critic who regards Kafka as the harbinger of modernism in Europe is Frederick R. Karl’s *Franz Kafka: Representative Man* (1991). The Modernist movement which started in 1897 prompted by the ‘Vienna Secession’ was a break-away from the realist tradition. Kafka as a modernist writer is supported by many critics by seeing Kafka as an ego-centric where the self is at the centre and the artist’s works are regarded as personalized point of view. In this Kafka was influenced by his teacher at High School Herr Gottwald who was a Darwinist, a Positivist and an Atheist. And Kafka has also been a site of much interest for the Marxists. Marxism being a historical product of capital sees the individual also as an offspring of production and
reproduction. For the Marxists, all narratives are closely associated with factors of production and it is expressed in the language of the world; wherein the individual’s destiny is closely linked with the destiny of his country or world. If one loses contact with the world then the individual’s life becomes unnarratable; and being lost in the world becomes incapable of being narrated. In Kafka, the loss of the individual takes place and hence the narrator most often takes the form of animals, parables or dream narratives. The individual narrative written against the world becomes a collective narrative; and for the Marxists, the collective struggle is more important and therefore they see Kafka’s protagonists as truncated individuals. In the bureaucracy being satirized, Kafka evokes Marxist interpretation. Throughout the late twentieth century a lot of critical essays sharing this perspective have been come out like The Kafka Problem (1963) edited by Angel Flores, Franz Kafka: An Anthology of Marxist Criticism (1981) edited by Kenneth Hughes, The World of Franz Kafka (1980) edited by J.P.Stern; and Ruth V.Cross’s Critical Essays on Franz Kafka (1990)

However, Marxists literary criticism are divided in their take on Kafka. Kafka’s works came to prominence during the same period when the Stalinists were advancing the doctrine of ‘Socialist Realism’; which encouraged all left-wing artists to follow the naturalists and positive portraits of the working-class life steering clear of abstractions and other such avant-garde styles. They accused Kafka of ‘excessive formalism’ and for creating an alienated vision of reality where individuals were reduced from active participants in life to merely being clinical observers. But the other section of Marxists regard Kafka’s works as reflecting not despair but finely observed critiques of power. Theodor Adorno describes Kafka’s writings as ‘a reaction to unlimited power’ which articulates the modern human condition where man is forced to endure the random cruelty of existence; a harsh existence which we are unable to understand, yet
is condemned to live. If an allegory reads only behind the text, Kafka prompts us to delve deep and read into his texts. Freud saw the repressed libido as the source of neurosis. Erich Heller links Kafka’s fiction to Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy of the ‘Universal Will’. Arthur Schopenhauer in *The world as Will and Idea* (1906) writes how all creatures are doomed to suffer because of ‘principium individuations’ which separates them from the Universal Will which is the blind force within all individuals and it is this force in Kafka’s characters, which makes them imbued with a sense of guilt. Friedrich Beissner, rejecting all philosophical and theological approach, in a series of essays presents Kafka as representing the inner world. Thomas Mann reads Kafka’s works as an allegory of the metaphysical quest for God. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari regard Kafka’s works as more subversive and more ‘joyful’ than it appears to be. Milan Kundera refers to the essentially surrealist humor of Kafka. Kafka’s legal background has helped him shape several legal dimensions, particularly the role of law, in his fictions. His fictions record accurate descriptions of the legal and criminal proceedings of the German and Austrian legal system of that time. Kafka also had a doctorate degree in jurisprudence in July, 1906. So it is not surprising that the Jurist Richard Posner finds a critique of the prevailing legal practice in Kafka’s fictions. It is also true that Kafka involved himself with the litigation practice and was keenly aware of the legal debates of his time. Reza Banakar argues that the legal images of Kafka’s works suggest a particular concept of law and legality operating parallel against the human condition. There is a profound understanding of the law and he is able to grasp the law as a form of experience. Richard Posner’s *Law and Literature* (2009) is a reaction against the writings of Robin West, who has written substantially against Posner’s economic take on the legal interpretations. Posner is of the opinion that literature does not have any weight
in the legal realm, and literary writers have often put law into their writings, yet those writings are not of any value to the legal studies. Hence Posner does not believe in the use of literary discourse in jurisprudential debate because he opines that the law is to be regarded only as a subject matter rather than a technique. Posner also believes that literary works have no place in judicial debate because one can never truly contemplate the original meaning of the author; and that works of fiction should only be considered in their contexts. He characterizes the discovery of law in fiction as ‘ancillary’ and asserts that the main subject matter of the novels is always universal human condition and not a specific legal setting. Fiction with legal background should only be considered as pure background as in Albert Camus’s The Outsider where sideling the legal entangle the work should only be studied as Mérault’s growth of self-awareness. So according to Posner, the scholars studying the implication of law in Literature should only regard fiction with legal background as important only on a personal level and they are of no value as sources of legal philosophy and reform. Others like Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancie while agreeing with Posner, regard the Judges’ moral positions determined by normative social and political forces rather than by literature. Kafka’s last writings, consisting of twenty notebooks and thirty five letters to Dora Diamant was confiscated from her by the Gestapo in Berlin in 1933. Many scholars have criticized scholars who have tried to mystify Kafka, presenting him as a kind of an ascetic or as an emblem of sainthood. In an important work like Excavating Kafka (2008) by James Hawes condemns those scholars who are responsible for creating “the K. myth”; or as a tortured artist cum saint. In a review of this book by Hawes, Nicholas Murray writes: “It is Hawes’s mission to remind us that he liked upmarket porn, consorted with prostitutes, and treated his women rather badly, none of which will be news to anyone who has any basic knowledge of Kafka
derived from recent biography. However, it should be made clear that Hawes disliked Kafka the man but values Kafka the writer. Therefore Kafka’s works are full of shifting paradoxes and this study aims to locate the existential crisis in Kafka. The study takes off from previous critical literary interpretations on Kafka and raises some fundamental questions ignored and overlooked by the previous scholars in study Kafka from an existential point of view. The apparent hopelessness and absurdity have often made it common for all to consider Kafka as a profoundly negative writer but this investigation would make a study through his three novels, complete short stories, diaries and letters how amidst this hopelessness, there still is still hope emanating. The apparent hopelessness and absurdity in Kafka’s works have prompted almost every one to trace existentialism in Kafka but to consider existentialism as absolute hopelessness would only lead to a narrowing down of the context; rather the object of my study would be to show how it is through this existential crisis Kafka does not plunge to the depths of despair but makes hope possible. What makes this study unique is how the suffering faced by one individual expressed through his dream like inner state actually becomes a universal fable of hope.