

# Paradoxical Binary and Kafka

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## Abstract

Franz Kafka seeks a mythical dimension of truth amid the contradictions, which is the central ambiguity of the existential approach within this context. In *The Trial*, Kafka uses contradicting paradoxes to express themes such as heretical solitude, constant control, domination, alienation, loneliness, and the burden of guilt. The questions of the matter discussed in *The Trial* are thematic paradoxes, such as confusion or equivocation between different levels of abstraction in tragic space and timing. Kafka's protagonists are lonely and isolated figures consigned to oblivion and trapped amid the notion of good and evil—the central dilemma timelessly. Displayed through binary opposition of paradoxes, Kafka's protagonist questions his identity, which is double bonded in the corrupt world he belongs to and the current alienated one. Besides, *The Castle* represents the individual's struggle against the system of bureaucracy; *Metamorphosis* demonstrates Gregor Samsa's animal form in opposition to his human mentality, and "The Hunter Gracchus" shows alienation between self/I and man/body. Kafka utilizes the binary to present the meaning defined by everything surrounding it—striking Derrida's Deconstruction theory. Kafka creates paradoxical contradictions, and the symbols in Kafka's works—whether they are animals or authorities such as the father, *The Trial*, or the castle—represent the inconsistent two-way tensions of the protagonist's inner life, which can neither be this nor that. This conflict is in the realm of the struggles of the protagonist and the constraints of realizing reasoning inclination to the human subconscious.

**Keywords:** Binary Oppositions, *The Trial*, *The Castle*, *Metamorphosis*, Paradoxes

## KAFKA VE PARADOKSAL İKİLİ KARŞITLIK

### Öz

Franz Kafka, öykülerinde mitsel boyutu çelişkiler vasıtasıyla bulmayı ve bu bağlamda, varoluşun belirsizliğini açıklamaktadır. Kafka *Dava'*da mahremiyeti ihlal etme, sürekli kontrol edilme, tahakküm, yabancılaşma, yalnızlık ve suçluluk duygusu gibi temaları göstermek için ikili karşıtlık kullanmaktadır. Trajik ortamda, farklı soyutlama seviyeleri arasındaki kafa karışıklığı veya ikirciklilik gibi tematik paradokslar, *Dava'*da tartışılan temel unsurdur. Kafka'nın kahramanları, unutulmaya mahkûm edilmiş ve günümüz dünyasının en büyük acıları olan ve iyi ve kötü kavramların ortasında kapana kısılmış yalnız ve izole figürlerdir. Paradoksların ikili karşıtlığı üzerinden sergilenen Kafka'nın kahramanı, ait olduğu yozlaşmış dünyayla ve şimdiki yabancılaşmış dünyada çifte kimliğini sorgulamaktadır. *Şato*, bireyin bürokrasi sistemine karşılık verdiği mücadeleyi temsil ederken; *Dönüşüm*, Gregor Samsa'nın insan zihniyetine karşı hayvan formunu ve "Avcı Gracchus" ise kişi/ben ile insan/beden arasındaki yabancılaşmayı

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sergilemektedir. Kafka, insanı çevreleyen şey tarafından tanımlanan anlamı, Yapısöküm teorisini ikili karşıtlık çerçevesinde sunmaktadır. Kafka paradoksal ikili karşıtlık—baba, mahkeme veya kale gibi hayvanlar veya yetkililer—yaratarak, semboller ile kahramanın içsel ve iki yönlü tutarsızlığını gösterir. Bu çatışma, bir seçim için sebep arayışında olan ve mücadele etmeyen insanlığın bilinçaltında olan kahramanın sınırlarının ötesinde değildir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: İkili Karşıtlık, Dava, Şato, Dönüşüm, Paradokslar*

## INTRODUCTION

Assigned implicit meanings adopt Kafka's works of art as a surreal transmission of commentaries; "Frequently literature is thought of as a form of philosophy, as 'ideas' wrapped in form; and it is analyzed to yield 'leading ideas'" (Wellek & Warren, 1956, p.110). In this realm, comparative studies pave the way for the advancement of literature (Wellek et al., 2009) by expanding the scope of literary studies through "other areas of knowledge and belief" for "the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression" (Remak, 1961, p.3). Utterly, writers and artists herald interdisciplinary analysis of form and content, the impact of literature/arts, and their combination. (Gaither, 1961, p.154) These "natural affinities" "suggest the parallels, the influences, the borrowings" (Gaither, 1961, p.170) in the service of literary texts to clarify contradictions, such as binary opposition, in the form of symbols and signs play a crucial role accordingly. This study deals with the aspects of dual binary oppositions to study apparent frameworks of modernism unbarred for Kafkaesque protagonists.

Binary Oppositions, adapted by Claude Lévi-Strauss to explore the relationships between different social groups and their cultural/class differences, is a paradoxical system in literature for perceiving alterations. For Saussure, the binary opposition elucidates paradoxical themes to generate a perspective for the perception of subcategories through sign systems. Nietzsche deconstructs the human system through its hierarchization of opposites, engaged in a valuation process that favors an end over process, being over becoming, foundation over the surface, and good over evil, and says: "There exists neither 'spirit', nor 'reason' nor 'thinking', nor 'consciousness', nor 'soul', nor 'will', nor 'truth': all are fictions that are of no use" (1967, p.480).

### The Binary Opposition and Truth

In Kafka's work, binary thinking reflects a situation of either/or dichotomies—e.g., between poles after irrational fear. In literature, binary opposition deconstructs the dangers of binary thinking, which causes suspicion, prejudice, irrational fear, and preferring a side. Kafka utilizes the binary of opposites through contradictions, favoring characters that reflect other defined concepts.

Unlike Nietzsche, Kafka asserts the absolute and unbridgeable distinction between what he calls in various ways the sensory and the allegorical worlds. And unlike Nietzsche, his attachment to the *opposition* of sense and spirit precisely involves holding on to the concept of property, of 'belonging to.' For Kafka, the concept of belonging to, in the relation of language and referent, is not a fiction; it is necessarily the case. (Corngold, 1988, p.149)

Kafka implicitly provides multiplicity within the very world that accommodated itself to antithesis. Kafka's suspicions about oppositions emerge as self-evaluated: "My repugnance for [oppositions] is certain...They make for thoroughness, fullness, and completeness, but only like a figure on the 'wheel of life' [a toy with a revolving wheel]; we have chased our little idea around the circle. They [antithesis] are as undifferentiated as they are different" (1976, p. 157). Interpretations gleaned from Kafka's stories cause contradicted readings of the protagonists' situations, who struggle to find the truth. In *Metamorphosis*, a metamorphosed protagonist identifies his inner self; however, he cannot reconvert to his former human state after becoming an insect. Herewith, he is "separating humans from other animals" and "exposes the construction of the human/animal binary, and also deconstructs this binary" (Harel, 2020, p.22). For the protagonist, "This binary opposition in Georg's nature is hinted by his father who denounces him 'an innocent child' and at the same time a 'devilish human being'" (Şafak, 2014, p.259). Here, "the father collapses, and with him, the easy binary opposition of father and son, judge and criminal, is at least called into question" (Rolleston, 2006, p.90). Accordingly, "...these tales typically reinforce the human/animal binary, as well as the anthropocentric paradigm, by presenting a psychophysical split. While the human body is transformed into a nonhuman body, the mind remains human throughout the plot, allowing the human and the nonhuman to oppose and define each other" (Harel, 2020, p.34).

In *The Truth about Sancho Panza*, "the dualism ... is personified in the characters of Sancho and the Don, and their particular relationship casts the issue of self-awareness" (McCort, 2007, par.25). Besides, Kafka puts himself in the shoes of the innocent Karl, the protagonist of *Amerika*, who endures the pains and sufferings of life: "[He] had displayed the misery of his heart, now they might as well see the rags that covered his body, and then they could thrust him out" (Kafka, 1981, p.39). When he reaches the promised land, the statue of freedom, which holds a sword—not a torch—, which is reminiscent of the angels who prevented him from approaching immortality after Adam's sin and expulsion from heaven. Karl enters the city of Ramses, referencing the Exodus in *The Torah*—the Egyptians employed the people of Israel in Ramses city. Amerika, where innocent Karl visits—is not the promised heaven but symbolizes the Hell in Eden. Similarly, in "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk," the community is in awe of the influence of Josephine's singing, which consists of the sound of prevalent "piping" of society. Thereby, "Josephine's art is a fiction ... originates from the sound of piping ... a higher and an aesthetic form of a musical song", and "Josephine narrates the truth about that society and her art derives from the very basic societal behaviour of piping" (Nas, 2010, par.3).

In "The Hunter Gracchus," a boat carrying the long-dead Hunter Gracchus leads him to the promised land; however, the ship is not at the helm and wanders into the depths of the land of death. Hunter Gracchus suffers the fate of a rural man, who prevents him from reaching the truth. The mayor of Riva visits a man with a hat and a crepe ribbon, introduces himself as the mayor, who is probably a known church member in the port and guides him to Gracchus's coffin. He walks over to Gracchus's dead body, removes the coffin, kneels, prays, and tells the mayor that he was killed many years ago in the black oak wood in Germany while he was hunting mountain

goats. The black oak wood does not symbolize the misguidance of the people who blocked Jesus, but a reference to the belligerence of the Germans may allude to Germany's history. Gracchus tells the mayor that his death ship is lost and cannot enchant lands due to the negligence of the boatman (the church), who was supposed to go to the colonized countries. His boat is wide on the ground, and he fails to deliver the valid message of Jesus and his teachings are misinterpreted. Due to abuses of the Church—including the reign of the Inquisition—the corruption of clergies, the suppression of religious movements, the massacre of rebels, and Galileo's forcing to seek forgiveness, Jesus failed in his mission and walked in the mire between life and death. Jesus—alive or dead—cannot be resurrected after the crucifixion, and his ship has no rudder; it is subject to the wind that blows to the death.

Gracchus wears a dirty shroud, and his gray hair is messy. His body is covered with a scarf and a sacred candle burns above his head. A miniature painting on the wall shows a forest man holding a spear behind a shield. Kafka's portrayal is an allusion to the past civilization of the primitive African tribes, who left behind traces of civilization and are now in decline. Or, the decline of Christianity—due to the false teachings of the Church—made religion inconsistent with scientific advances. Gracchus faces the horrible fact that sacrificing one's life for the sake of God does not untie the knot of human problems with unknown innate delinquency, confirmed by a dogmatic belief in original sin. Life is nothing but a leap that is constantly irreversible. We live in a world of judiciary, absenteeism, and misunderstandings so that we may be arrested, tortured, and executed groundlessly.

The danger that "K," the protagonist of *The Castle*, poses to society is his unbearable characteristics. Like Kafka, he enters the mysterious land; the palace is an ideal and unattainable, and K's attempt to enter it is a struggle to reach the truth. When K steps into the village, the palace is encased in a thick fog, plunged into darkness, in the middle of the snow, and rockbounded except on foot. The mayor of the palace ruling West-west (sunset) and the traveler who passes through the emptiness of snow to reach his homeland find nothing except the sub-zero cold, darkness, and eternal sunset. The fact that the ruler of the mysterious palace is in silence gives us the impression that the truth is silent. Here, officials constantly change, appearing as a delegation in the village/palace and experiencing reincarnation after drinking beer. When an official is asleep, his appearance differs, or their appearance change while being alone. Whenever an official's mood changes, his face changes, and the fear/hope is predicted. Wearing black, an official's appearance remains static; the truth is constantly changing, but clothes are always black. Like the gods of ancient Greece, such as Zeus, palace officials had intercourse with the females of the village, and the villagers boasted of this honor. For K, the truth is unattainable, invisible, and incomprehensible; he wants to speak with the official and waits for him on a snowy night, who does not show up. He also wants to visit the ruler of the West and a surveyor who hopes to seek the truth by discussing it logically.

The central theme of Kafka's *The Castle* is the palace of sincerity, representing human efforts to achieve the truth. The protagonist is a surveyor, and when the man is about to get salvation, he can find the truth. However, K has been chosen for salvation/reach the world of meaning; he wants

to reach an unattainable world through logic, but he fails—like humanity in strange to go beyond the fact. Kafka demonstrates how we are trapped in life, and like K, we try to reach the palace but get frustrated. K's perseverance and indefatigability give the book philosophical value—as our efforts give meaning to our lives. There is only one way for K to be saved, and as the village peasant, he illogically accepts the myths about the palace. Truth can be reached only through love, not reason. “[*The Castle*] challenges the reader to ‘locate’ the rest of K—and thereby reveal a hidden metaphysical truth and the inner logic lurking underneath the surface narrative” and “What is K.’s status in *The Castle*’s infrastructure?” (Pehar, 2017, p.99)

In *The Great Wall of China*, dignitaries live in an inaccessible place that no one has ever been to. This Great Wall is a philosophical and mental force that rules the people of China. This command center is located in the heart of China, but Chinese citizens cannot reach its center. The emperor is dead, and the Chinese people only dream of the message of the empire. Similarly, in *The Trial*, Kafka constantly reminds us that the truth is absent and altering it is impossible. The law or the court oppresses, and the courtiers lie to Josef K when they finally convince him a limited number of people control the rules. They hide the documents, the charges, the court verdict, and whatever he is accused of to leave him in ambiguity. *The Trial* is secret/public, and the truth—hidden/obvious—is visible/invisible. The staff and guards of this court are not aware of the secrets of the mysterious court, and Kafka, here, stands in awe.

The mysterious court in *The Trial* reveals Josef K's guilt, who is unaware of his crime when he is arrested. Even when the knife is inserted into K's throat and twisted, he is still unaware of his crime. A night before, no one told him that he would be killed tomorrow, although he was aware of it. The next day, he wears black clothes, sits waiting for personal inmates, and becomes a victim of a court that convicts and executes every human being for a crime he did not commit. Although no one is innocent, asking for forgiveness from that court is also futile. He is not aware that trial is the essence of lifecycle and everyone is a prisoner—with no iron bars or shackles: “Through punishments, societies mimic the divine in an attempt to get to an objective *truth* and balance a cosmic scale in the search for an ultimate Justice” (Cerfedda, 2019, p.109).

### **The Binary Opposition and Sin**

Kafka developed his thoughts globally by transforming mythological issues. To achieve his ideals, Kafka deprived himself of his family and never got married to touch his entire life in art. Kafka engaged three times: twice with Felice Bauer and once with Julie Wohryzek, neither of which led to marriage. (Canetti & Middleton, 1974) Insomnia and the torment of long-term writing caused them to experience ‘sin’ as the subject of his writings. Kafka was born into a Jewish family in Prague in 1883—a minority in Prague then—and played a crucial role in Kafka's works, and its traces are seen in most of his stories, including *The Trial*. Although the impact of being a minority, Jewish neighborhoods on Kafka's works are not overlooked, and *The Trial* narrates mainly his personal life and suffering of living in hard conditions.

There is a reference to the lack of sufficient air in *The Trial*; only K notices lousy weather, and other people easily accept every circumstance. Through a young man summoned to court for an unknown sin in *The Trial*, Kafka hints at the inner sense of guilt in his relationship with his father.

According to Kafka (2015), his father behaved coldly away from paternal affection, which is the source of corruption in Kafka's soul, explicitly addressed in *Letter to My Father (Dearest Father)*.

If you sum up your judgment of me, the result you get is that, although you don't charge me with anything downright improper or wicked (with the exception perhaps of my latest marriage plan), you do charge me with coldness, estrangement, and ingratitude. And, what is more, you charge me with it in such a way as to make it seem my fault, as though I might have been able, with something like a touch on the steering wheel, to make everything quite different, while you aren't in the slightest to blame, unless it be for having been too good to me. (Kafka, 2015, p.6)

It reminds the last sentence of *The Trial*: "It seemed as if his shame would live on after him." (Kafka et al., 2009, p.165) In *Dearest Father*, Kafka always felt his father's shadow on his acts and thoughts. He writes to his father: "I am afraid of you" (Kafka, 2015, p.5) but confesses, "My writing was all about you; all I did there, after all, was to bemoan what I could not bemoan upon your breast." (Kafka, 2015, p.36) He even does not realize his father's mental dominance over him and says, "What was always incomprehensible to me was your total lack of feeling for the suffering and shame you could inflict on me with your words and judgments. It was as though you had no notion of your power" (Kafka, 2015, p.12).

In Kafka's world, everything is upside down, and the reader of *The Trial* realizes something has happened to Josef K, disturbing others' peace. In *The Trial*, instead of K being interrogated in bed, a man calms the old couple, whose peace is disturbed by K. The opening scene of *The Trial*, formed by the unexpected arrival of an unknown man in K's room, is reminiscent of the memory that Kafka describes in *Dearest Father*:

One night I kept on whimpering for water, not, I am certain, because I was thirsty, but probably partly to be annoying, partly to amuse myself. After several vigorous threats had failed to have any effect, you took me out of bed, carried me out onto the *pavlatche*, and left me there alone for a while in my nightshirt, outside the shut door (Kafka, 2015, pp.8-9).

There is an unknown feeling of innate delinquency in the heart of humanity, confirmed by dogmatic belief—due to the theology of original sin. Accordingly, people are sentenced to death, and life is a continuous and irreversible leap into sin—due to the first fault of humans and the lasting fault of others. Kafka means resistance to predestination, and the protagonist—ensured to be defeated—obstinately resists. Kafka takes up the gauntlet to discover new possibilities through the old textual medium by demonstrating the protagonist's innocence and the overflow of tragedies that highlight the multifaceted contradiction between the political and sociological aspects of *The Trial*.

In *The Trial*, Kafkaesque characters are accused of an insignificant, vague sin and subject to condemnation; here, the crime is less important than the punishment. The boundary between Kafkaesque realism and imagination is formed in his charmed stria between reality and fantasy, as the surreal story combines symbolism with imagination to reach Kafkaesque meta-reality on existence. Kafkaesque binary opposition doubts a skepticism on partial phenomena of existence interspersed with optimism. K.'s composure in facing his condemnation proves his innocence; the

humor and horror hidden in the ridiculous world demonstrate the confusion of the Kafkaesque figure. K.'s composure makes him wander an alien world, which ironically is symbolic and portrays sinful humanity who is aware of neutrality of condemnation—whatever it is—but not their guilt in the core of their presence. Even Gregor Samsa's unavailing effort, without being surprised or horrified by such disgust, is to restore the former mood. The reaction of others alongside the protagonists does not tackle the trapped vortex; it is a form of a social phenomenon in the modern era. The Kafkaesque phenomenon does not belong to any generation and reveals terrible facts about the human contented parade of life. Kafka witnesses social contradictions: loneliness, alienation, and human suffering impasse in the Kafkaesque labyrinth of becoming a victim of the power of modern capitalism.

### CONCLUSION

Fiction is an exemplary reflection of the literary spirit of nations or civilizations, and Kafka narrates stories from the declination of modern Western societies. Kafka expresses a realist interpretation of 20th-century literary modernism; he passes through fantasy to get to reality or quite the opposite. His purgatory of superficial modernity narrates the catastrophic collapse that sustains modernity's imaginarieness on the substance of the deterioration of obliterated heritage. His protagonists, with the realization of transformations of self and time, challenge cultural and traditional factors and epitomize the consciousness of the weird situation imposed upon them by destiny. By observing the Kafkaesque themes minutely, the similarity in protagonists' resistance is quite apparent. Binary opposition in the sense of diametrical opposition between characters leads readers to apprehend duality in Kafkaesque narration of diversity hinted as a universal remedy.

The concept of binary opposition is central to structuralist conventions of a text by the imposition of order. "Western society and culture are grounded on a set of binary oppositions" (Rojas, 2015, p.74), and by opposing its unification with the truth, Kafka shows the contradiction between justice and injustice or paddling in bureaucratic systems by the binary opposition. Kafka refers to a duality or contradiction in human existence that, on the one hand, draws us to others because we need them and, on the other hand, keeps us at a distance from them—to be ourselves. Here, deconstruction examines "analogical oppositions" to show "how a text undermines the imposition of binary structure on it ... through its inherent 'disseminations'" (Cuddon, 1999, p.83). In *The Trial*, for example, an unusual mood against the usual assortments contradictory elements with metaphorical realism; it is a poignant topic of humanistic tragedy, and the mislaid truth in Kafkaesque writings pushes the protagonist to end up symbolically in court or analogically in a simulant setting. Thus, the implications behind the contradictions are the main subject of this study.

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FEMİNİST EDEBİYAT KURAMI BAĞLAMINDA

# GÜLTEN AKIN ŞİİRİ

GÖKAY DURMUŞ



  
Güncce Yayınları

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# Selim İleri Romancılığı



  
Güncce Yayınları

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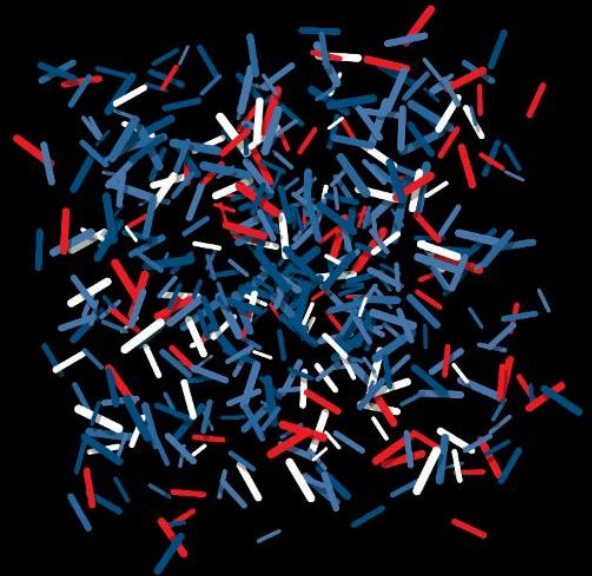


  
Güncce Yayınları

# FRANSIZCA VE TÜRKÇENİN SÖZDİZİMİ

KARŞITSAL VE DAĞILIMSAL BİR ÇÖZÜMLEME

Dr. Yusuf Topaloğlu



  
Güncce Yayınları